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THE EVIDENCE OF THE CATACOMBS

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THE EVIDENCE OF THE CATACOMBS

FOR THE DOCTRINES AND ORGANISATION OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

BY ORAZIO MARUCCHI

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J. K. Purdie, O.P.

PREFACE.

THE study of Christian archæology, which is subsidiary to that of Church history and of theology completes, with its monuments, what we can learn from documents about the events of the primitive Church, and confirms what theology teaches us about the dogmas of Christianity.

The monuments that pertain to the first ages of the Church are chiefly to be found in the catacombs of Rome—the cemeteries of the early Christians—and their great importance arises from the fact that, for the most part, they date from before the fifth century of our era.

The Roman catacombs with their inscriptions, their pictures and their sculptures, may be compared to a museum of primitive Christian monuments, which remain just where the early faithful put them. To this great museum also belong those monuments that were taken out of the cemeteries and placed in modern collections, of which the chief is the Lateran Museum.

Whoever visits a museum—for instance the British Museum—and studies it attentively, forms an idea of the religious opinions, the history, usages, and customs of the ancient Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks and Romans. In the same way, he who visits the catacombs or studies their monuments, gets to know what were the religious beliefs of the faithful who lived in the

ages of persecution and were contemporary with the martyrs, and of those who lived in the first years of the peace, when the same feelings and the same traditions were still fresh.

As to the codices, doubt may arise, however unfounded, as to whether they were corrupted when they were copied in later times, and whether they really hand down to us the text of ancient Christian writers. But, confronted by our monuments, it is impossible to doubt the authenticity of inscriptions, pictures and sculptures which we see in the catacombs and in museums, for they have reached us as they left the hands of the men of their day.

From my earliest youth I have been engaged in the study of these monuments, for from 1870 onwards I had the good fortune to be the disciple of the prince of Christian archæologists, John Baptist de Rossi. With him I assiduously visited the catacombs, I assisted at his excavations and was present at his discoveries. I have continued ever since to describe and illustrate the monuments in Italian and in French, so that I can say I have lived in the catacombs *for over fifty years*.

In my various works I have dealt with the history of the catacombs, with the description of the most important cemeteries, of the tombs of the martyrs buried therein and with other questions that bear on theology. I have also had occasion to accompany, on many occasions, learned Protestants and especially members of the Anglican Church on their visits to the catacombs, and I have noticed that the explanation I gave of monuments that concern dogmatic

questions on which our separated brethren differ from us, impressed them. I found out later that not a few of them, after studying Christian archæology, abandoned their prejudices.

The desire to benefit those separated brethren, who in great good faith follow false theories, has induced me to gather together in this little volume a short synthesis of the archæological arguments that can be drawn from the study of ancient Christian monuments in defence of the faith of the Catholic Church.

I invite, then, those with whom we have at least a common faith in Our Saviour—to meditate seriously on these arguments and to study their importance, hitherto not appreciated by many. I do this with the lively hope that they may return and be united to us, mindful of the great prayer uttered by Christ, when after the Last Supper, He prayed the Heavenly Father that all His disciples might be united among themselves as He was united to His Father.

"Holy Father keep them in Thy name whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one as We also are." —(*John xvii.* 11).

ORAZIO MARUCCHI.

ROME,

September, 1928.

CONTENTS.

Page

Preface ... ... v.

PART I.

General Remarks on the theories of certain Protestant Archæologists in their interpretation of the Monuments of the Catacombs 1

PART II.

CHAPTER

I. The Holy Eucharist 26

II. The Communion of Saints 47

III. The Cult of the Saints 58

IV. The Cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary ... 69

V. The Apostolic Foundation and the Supremacy of the Roman See 76

VI. Traditions relating to some Christians of the Apostolic Age 88

VII. The Supremacy of the Roman See in ancient Documents and in the Monuments of early Christianity 94

VIII. The Recent discovery of a Monument of the Apostles on the Via Appia ... 109

THE EVIDENCE OF THE CATACOMBS.

PART I.

GENERAL REMARKS ON THE THEORIES OF CERTAIN PROTESTANT ARCHÆOLOGISTS IN THEIR INTERPRETATION OF THE MONUMENTS OF THE CATACOMBS.

When in the sixteenth century the majestic unity of Christendom in the West was destroyed, thanks to Luther, and a great part of Europe revolted against submission to the Holy See, the followers of the new doctrine claimed to return to the traditions of the Christian Church of the first centuries, and accused the Catholics of having deviated from the ancient Faith. The apologists of Catholicism replied to the unjust charge, calling to witness the Fathers, and history; and the crude errors of the leaders of Magdeburg were splendidly confuted by the great Baronius in his immortal work *Annales Ecclesiastici*. But in the sixteenth century the religious controversy with the Protestants was based almost entirely on the Fathers and on history, and hardly any notice was taken of the monuments of the primitive Church, for these were practically unknown and critical archæology was not far enough advanced.

The most precious deposit of the primitive memories of Christianity, the inexhaustible treasury of the Roman catacombs, was almost unknown in those days. After the translation of the bodies of the martyrs within the city, which took place in the ninth century, these subterranean regions were abandoned, accumulated ruins gradually filled up the entrances, and popular devotion concentrated all the memories of the martyrs into those few corners of this necropolis which continued to be accessible because of their vicinity to some basilica. Thus it is that while the pilgrims of the sixth and seventh centuries used to visit almost all the catacombs, and wrote rough but faithful itineraries of their wanderings therein, pilgrims who later came to visit the sanctuaries of Rome only went down into the devastated catacombs of St. Sebastian, St. Pancras and St. Lawrence. These corners of the subterranean network, devoid as they were of monuments, were the only parts that were generally known during the middle ages and up to the second half of the sixteenth century.

The great discovery of subterranean Rome took place by accident in 1578, when a vast *hypogeum*, with pictures and inscriptions, was found on the Via Salaria, but this find remained unexplored until 1593, when the immortal Anthony Bosio set himself the colossal task of refinding the openings to all the Roman catacombs, which for so many years had been lost, and of exploring their dark recesses. The result of the lengthy studies and incredible labours of Bosio was given to the world after his death in 1632 by the Order of Malta—heir of the great archæologist,—which published his *Roma Sotterranea* with the best illustrations

that could be had in those days. From that time there was a reawakening of interest and of affection towards the catacombs on the part of religiously minded people, as well as of the learned and of students of archæology. The discovery of the resting places of so great a number of martyrs, who are mentioned in the Martyrologies, Calendars and in the Acts of Saints, aroused the enthusiasm of the devout ; and a desire to find the precious relics of the Confessors of Christ was the motive which determined the first excavations of this city of the dead. These first excavations led to new discoveries, and Catholic writers began to use the testimony of the monuments to defend the antiquity of the dogmas and usages of the Church against Protestants. These latter, attacked on their own ground of antiquity, were put on the defensive, but ignorant as they were of our monuments, and judging them according to their prejudices, read them amiss and made the most glaring mistakes.

The first to deal with the question were Misson and Burnet (1692), who boldly denied the Christianity of the Roman catacombs, and pronounced them to be either pagan burial places or at least places where Christian and pagan were buried alike ; they claimed moreover to prove that the pictures and the inscriptions were the work of the middle ages. But the writings of the followers of Bosio, such as Boldetti, Marangoni and Bottari, demonstrated the falsity of such opinions, and rebuked the audacity of these men who from their studies at Leipzig or London claimed to teach the men on the spot what the catacombs were.

In the last century the study of Christian Antiquities.

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which for a long time had lain rather neglected, made great progress ; it was men like Settele and Marchi who in Italy contributed to this revival, and the errors of Misson and of Burnet were finally confuted by the studies and the writings of these men ; and so victoriously was the Christianity and antiquity of the Roman Catacombs demonstrated, that the German Protestant writers themselves gave in and no longer repeated their false opinions. It was soon after, that John Baptist De Rossi dedicated his life to the study of Christian Antiquities. He was destined by Providence to continue the great work of Bosio and raise it to the level of a modern science. By order of Pius IX, he undertook to describe the underground city of the martyrs by applying to his description and explanation of the sacred monuments the most accepted standards of historical and archæological criticism. And his *Roma Sotterranea*, although it was not apologetic in character, became of its very nature a splendid archæological apology of Catholic dogma.[1]

Our opponents however, could not remain beneath the weight of so eloquent a confutation, and many years ago a minister, the Rev. T. Roller, was entrusted with the writing of another *Roma Sotterranea* from a Protestant point of view.[2] To examine all the strange theories put forward by this author would mean writing

[1] On the Roman Catacombs see the second volume of my *Eléments d'Archéologie chrétienne* viz. *Itinéraire des catacombes* (Desclée) as also my *Catacombe romane—Compendio della Roma sotterranea* (Desclée 1905).

[2] Théophile Roller.—*Les catacombes de Rome, Histoire de l'art et des croyances religieuses pendant les premiers siecles du christianisme* (Paris 1881).

a long theological dissertation, for his book never leaves the field of dogmatic controversy. I prefer however, to limit myself to its archæological aspects, pointing out the fantastic interpretation he gives to the monuments of the catacombs, and his sophistical deductions, and showing how, although he put together all that Protestants had hitherto written on the subject, he nevertheless did not succeed in producing a serious scientific objection against the Catholic way of thinking.

From the outset, it is necessary to remove the exaggerated idea that the monuments of the Roman catacombs are able to manifest the entire thought of primitive Christian society. Protestants frequently harbour this prejudice and expect us to show them in the catacombs the complete exposition of the dogma and discipline of the Church ; whereas really, these monuments, being solely sepulchral, represent chiefly the ideas of the early faithful about the future life, their aspirations and hopes, and above all their affection for the dead and their veneration for the martyrs. In short, the Christians of the first centuries never had the intention of exposing in the monuments of the catacombs their whole creed ; but we can infer it if we approach their pictures and inscriptions without preconceived ideas ; nor did they ever dream that future ages would one day use the testimony of their tombs in religious controversy. The ancient Christian monuments therefore should not be studied by themselves, but in conjunction with the study of the whole Church tradition which is found in the works of the Fathers and of sacred writers, in ancient Liturgies and

other documents ; only thus will those inscriptions and pictures speak clearly and with full efficacy.

From among all the controverted points on which Roller combats Catholic doctrine, I shall choose four because they are the most important, and from an examination of these we can form a just idea of this Protestant *Roma Sotterranea.* Our four points are the Eucharist, Prayers for the dead, the Cult of Saints, and finally the Authority of the Church and of the Apostolic See.

* * * *

Many are the representations in the catacombs in which can be seen evident allusion to the mystery of the Eucharist ; among these are those numerous scenes of banquets where the guests feed on the bread and the fish, or symbolic ἰχθύς, which, in the secret language of the Christians meant the Divine Redeemer ; but perhaps no monument is more precious in this respect than a fresco in the cemetery of Callixtus which, because of its style, we can put down to the second century. It represents a fish swimming through the water, and on its back it carries a basket containing some loaves and a little vessel with red wine. This group is evidently symbolic, and from our knowledge of the symbolical language of the Christians, and of the opinion of the Fathers, the explanation cannot be other than a figure of Christ, who brings the faithful the gift of the Eucharistic Species, and evidently the intention is to identify that bread and that wine with the mystical fish, Jesus Christ. The ancient Christian writers, however, are not alone in speaking to us of the symbolism

of the fish and of banquets alluding to the Eucharist, but two most ancient Greek inscriptions, one from Gaul and the other from Asia Minor, prove to us that everywhere such was the idea of the early Christians.

In the former of these two epigraphs, found at Autun (the ancient Augustodunum), the Eucharistic Bread is called simply ἰχθύς (the fish) in the following words: "Take the sweet food of the Saviour of the Saints; eat hungrily, holding the fish in thy hands." Thus then, is attested the identity between the ἰχθύς and the Eucharistic bread that we see blended together in the ancient picture. In the second inscription which belongs to Abercius, the holy bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, it is also stated that the heavenly nourishment, source of life eternal, is the ἰχθύς, most sweet food that the Church gives to the faithful under the form of bread mingled with the finest wine. After all this, how can one doubt that the pictures found in the catacombs, and which date from the second and third centuries, represent the Eucharistic Sacrament, whence the faithful drew their martyr's courage, and which they therefore represented on their tombs? Roller however sees things differently. The fish that carries the basket of loaves, for him is a decorative picture of still life such as is seen in great numbers at Pompeii (*Les Catacombes*, etc., Vol. I, page 98). It is unheard of that still life should be represented in those days with a live fish swimming boldly through the water, and it is extraordinary news that such scenes are common at Pompeii, where no one has ever seen one!

Roller should have proved the picture of a fish with a basket of loaves on its back to be a natural group.

But no such group is to be found in nature, so we must recognise a symbolic meaning in that strange representation, and the symbolism can be no other than that which I have just suggested.

Roller continues to accumulate sophistries about those Eucharistic pictures which depict the Supper, and he tries to demonstrate that they do not indicate the faith of the Christians in the Real Presence, and that Protestants may very well accept them as they are. He says that if the artist wished to express faith in the presence of Christ in the Sacrament he would have had to represent the guests as kneeling, whereas they are comfortably seated round the table (Vol. I, page 143) It is astounding in a book of Archæology to find such utter forgetfulness of the spirit of ancient art and its symbolism ! For as was natural, an artist who wished to represent a banquet, represented it according to the usages of his day. Moreover in the first centuries the custom of receiving the Eucharist kneeling did not exist, nor did this diversity take away from the belief in the Real Presence ; for the faithful received the Eucharist standing to signify the Resurrection of Christ, and the celebrant in the Latin rite still communicates standing, as do all the faithful among the Greeks ; and it is a well known fact that genuflection was reserved for days of penance.

While he is on the Eucharist, Roller begins to argue about the Mass, at least he denies that antiquity makes any mention of it. I shall not follow him here ; to confute him would suffice the testimony of St. Justin Martyr who describes for us the ceremonies of the Eucharistic oblation in the second century, in substance

identical with those of the present day. But I should like just to point out how he misinterprets the most authoritative documents, and how out of date he is in his erudition, to say the least of it. He says, then, that no mention of the sacrifice of the Mass is to be found in the cemeteries of the first ages of the Church, whereas it is certain that from the outset the liturgy was celebrated at the tombs of the martyrs and on their anniversaries; and he adds that the first mention of the Mass in the catacombs is made by the *Liber Pontificalis*, which he attributes to Anastasius and the ninth century. As a fact it is now demonstrated that the origins of the *Liber Pontificalis* are very much more ancient, so that the information that it gives us in its oldest form is connected with documents of the fourth century. Then, anybody who has made some sort of serious study of Christian Antiquities, knows very well that the funeral liturgy was celebrated, even in the days of persecution, in those family chapels and cubicles which are so numerous in our catacombs, and that in the same period liturgical meetings were held in the spacious crypts of the Martyrs, and in the oratories above ground, built over the cemeteries. I consider it a waste of time to prove this fact which had long been held by Christian tradition, and which De Rossi in Vol. III of his *Roma Sotterranea* has fully established by weighty and unshakable arguments.

And now let us pass on to the second of the points under examination: prayers for the dead.

Affection towards the departed and aspirations towards the future life naturally reign supreme in the catacombs, and are reflected in every monument of this

immense dormitory of primitive Christianity. The faithful of the first centuries, situated in the midst of the sensual materialism of paganism, must have felt very strongly the desire for a life to come and of a blessed eternity, the reward of so many sacrifices and persecutions, a compensation for the hatred and contempt with which the proud pagan civilisation regarded them. Hence we read frequently on inscriptions in the catacombs the wish of the living for their beloved dead, that they may be happy in the joys of a better life and may repose in the peace of Christ. "In pace, in Deo, in Christo, Spiritus tuus in bono."

From this desire it was natural to go on to express the wish that it might be accomplished: and so we get prayers for the dead that usually take the form of asking for the soul the *refrigerium*, refreshment. This word sacred in the ancient Church, and since preserved in the liturgy down to the present day, refers to the symbolic idea of the mystic banquet of the saints where souls may appease their hunger and quench their thirst, and Tertullian tells us that this very word means precisely prayers for the dead.

Roller however abhors such an idea and boldly asserts that in Christian inscriptions there is nothing but a *wish* that the departed may have peace, and never a prayer that they may obtain it. If however we go down into the underground regions and walk along the dark passages we read on the *loculi* and *arcosolia*,

"Deus refrigeret spiritum tuum, Refrigera Deus animam."

"May God refresh thy spirit, O God refresh his soul." as well as the ungrammatical but beautiful expression:

"Quisque de fratribus roget Deum ut sancto et innocente spiritu ad Deum suscipiatur." (*sic*).

"Let each of the brethren pray to God that his holy and innocent spirit be taken unto God."

Is not this prayer for the dead in all its fulness? And if the Christians had wished to pray for their dear ones, what words would they have had to use if not these?

But our opponent has found a very easy way out of his difficulties; he pronounces all the inscriptions, and they are very many, which clearly teach prayers for the departed, to be of late date.

This archæological judgment of his could not however have been more unfortunate, for De Rossi has established as a secure canon of Christian epigraphy that the prayer for *refrigerium* is to be found also in the most ancient inscriptions, namely in those before the peace of the Church (A.D. 313), while it rarely appears in monuments of the fourth century and almost disappears in the fifth.

Nor can I omit to point out how Roller bases his judgment of the chronology of the inscriptions on false principles, and how in consequence his deductions are necessarily wrong. Among other things he affirms that some of these inscriptions must be very late because in them we find the monogram of Christ adopted in the context as an abbreviation for Christus (I, p. 218). Those who know nothing about archæology may blindly believe this statement, but men even superficially versed in these matters know very well that the opposite is true, and that such use of the monogram is peculiar to the early period.

But what is the value of the numerous inscriptions of the first three centuries in the catacombs which seek *refrigerium* for the departed? Do you wish to know how and when the custom of praying for the dead was introduced? Roller will tell you that in the fifth century, shortly before Pope Gelasius, a certain opinion had begun to arise among the people that prayers helped the dead, an opinion hitherto unknown. This popular idea was approved by Gelasius, and sanctioned by him in his liturgy—somewhat on the lines of the Church of England's sanction of prayers for the departed, because people felt the need of them after the war! It would be difficult to jump five centuries of history more cavalierly.

Apart from the testimony of monuments, which, as I have said, are most ancient, what has Roller to say to the authentic acts of St. Perpetua, a document of the beginning of the third century, in which we have evidence of the efficacy of such prayers? What does he think of the witness of Tertullian (A.D. 160—222) who records "oblationes pro defunctis," "sacrifices for the dead" (*De Corona*, C. 3), and the prayers of the Christian wife for her husband's soul (*De Monogamia*, C. 10)? How does he interpret the words of St. Cyprian (A.D. 200—258) who speaks of the "sacrificium pro dormitione," "sacrifice for those who sleep" (Ep. 66)? In fine, what can he say to all the liturgies in the East and West which existed long before Gelasius, all of which with one voice attest the universal custom of the Church of praying for the dead?[1] (*Renaudot, etc.*). But I shall not tire the reader with insistence on things

[1] See also Mone: *Lateinische und griechische Messen.*

so well known ; I have only wished to say something to show, by means of this fresh example, to what the boasted critical method of some writers so often reduces itself.

As they besought refreshment and peace for the departed, it is also natural that the primitive Christians should wish them the company of the saints who enjoy God in the blessed joys of Heaven ; and thus we frequently read this wish on the tombs :

" Vivas inter Sanctos." " May you live with the saints."

" Spiritus tuus inter Sanctos." " May your spirit be with the Saints."

It is certain too that through the idea of the Communion of Saints it was usual to pray to the departed on behalf of the living as we often read in the inscriptions:

" In pace et pete pro nobis." " In peace and pray for us."

" Bene refrigera et roga pro nobis." " Be you well refreshed and pray for us."

With how much greater reason therefore must the faithful have turned to the intercession of the confessors of the Faith who with certainty were known to be dear to God, sharers of His glory, and whose company the Christians prayed might be granted to the departed.

In fact the whole of Christian antiquity offers us most splendid evidence which attests the invocation and the veneration of Saints from the earliest ages. This is proved from the most ancient liturgies, both of the East and of the West, where during the Eucharistic sacrifice itself the saints are commemorated, from the letter of the church of Smyrna on the martyrdom of

St. Polycarp, written in the second century, and from many quotations from the early Fathers; moreover we find evidence of the same thing in the catacombs, where in their inscriptions the faithful invoke the martyrs, represent them on their tombs in the act of accompanying souls to heaven, and ardently desire to be buried near them.

However, before so many and so clear proofs of the remote antiquity of the cult of the saints, the author of this Protestant *Roma Sotterranea* does not lose heart; but first confuses the adoration that is reserved to God alone with the veneration that the Church has for the Saints (2, 196); then asserts without rime or reason that the evidence with regard to it is no older than the fourth century, whereas we have seen how much more ancient it really is; and finishes by denying the authenticity of every monument that goes against his thesis. So in his account of a famous *graffito* in the cemetery of Pretextatus in which the intercession of martyrs is sought on behalf of the dead, unable to explain it on his system, he attributes it to popular superstition (I. p. 84), and when he finds the words "Roga" or "pete pro nobis" (pray for us) he says it is invented by an ignorant stone-cutter (II. p. 173). If one continues to use this convenient method, it is easy to destroy the most explicit evidence of history and of the monuments. Roller at the same time wants to study the catacombs and rejects the clearest testimony that they have left us. Such a way of arguing cannot be called scientific, nor survive serious criticism.

What Roller says about the saints he naturally extends to Our Lady as well, denying that there was

any veneration for her in the early ages, and says that Proclus of Constantinople introduced this in the fifth century. That such an error is elementary, will clearly appear to anyone who has skimmed through the origins of Church history and literature. In fact it is well known that in the second century Irenæus in his treatise *Adversus haereses* gave Our Lady the title of " Advocata " (V. 19), a title which carries with it the idea of intercession, and that all the most ancient liturgies name the Virgin with great honour, before the martyrs and even before the Apostles. Thus in the most ancient liturgy of St. James, which is extant in Greek and in Syriac, and which was published by Assemani, we read :

> " Let us commemorate the most holy, immaculate and ever Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and all the saints in order that by their intercession we may all obtain mercy."[1]

In the liturgy of St. Mark, at the *anaphora* (or offertory) during the sacrifice itself, Our Lady is invoked, a practice that was never used in the Roman liturgy ; and the invocation of the Virgin at the offertory is also found in the Coptic fragment in the Borgian Museum, published by Giorgi, and in the so-called Mass of St. John Chrysostom, which the Greeks still use.

While we are on the subject of ancient liturgies I must not pass over another remarkable error of our opponent. He gives his readers to understand that he had made an extraordinary discovery—in fact he has found out that far from invoking the Blessed Virgin, they used to pray for her ! If Roller made that

[1] Assemani, *Cod. Litt. eccl. univ* VI, 2.24.—V. Renaudot II, 138 *seq.*

statement in good faith, as I suppose, then it is obvious that he has either not read those prayers, or else he has not understood their meaning. For admitting that in some liturgies there is a certain confusion, perhaps due to errors in the codices, in the more famous and approved liturgies the matter is quite plain. In that of St. Basil for instance, the invocation prayer is put at the *Memento* under the form of a commemoration, but there is no doubt as to what is meant, for it is a prayer to God to remember the Immaculate Virgin and the Saints, in order that by their intercession He may have pity on us. God is reminded, then, of Our Lady and the Saints not as a prayer for them, but in order that the Lord in view of their merits may accept their intercession on our behalf.

This most ancient cult of Christendom towards the Virgin Mary is confirmed by the monuments of the Roman catacombs, for among the pictures which adorn the *cubicula*, *loculi* and *arcosolia*, Our Lady is not infrequently represented. An early as 1864, De Rossi published a learned work on pictures of Our Lady which are found in the catacombs, and choosing from these five of the most important, he described them and demonstrated their antiquity by a critical comparison with other pictures. The most ancient of these decorates a tomb in the cemetery of Priscilla on the Via Salaria, and represents the Mother with Her Divine Son in her bosom, with the prophet Isaias standing in front pointing to the symbolic star which appears above. This picture is certainly not later than the beginning of the second century. To name only the chief ones, there follow in order of time, the

pictures in the cemeteries of Domitilla, Callixtus, SS. Peter and Marcellinus, and St. Agnes, all of which may be put down to the third and fourth centuries.

Roller, repeating what all other Protestants had said before him, maintains that such pictures prove nothing for the veneration of Our Lady, because Mary is represented there only as an historical figure. But this interpretation does not fit the manner in which Our Lady is represented. She is always in the place of honour and seated in the *cathedra*, or chair; and it is well known that in ancient Christian art the *cathedra* signifies more than human dignity. Moreover if the scene of the Epiphany (adoration of the Magi), which is often met with in the catacombs, is called historical, not so that other where the Mother and the Child Jesus are found alone; and that is the way in which the earliest picture of Our Lady that we know of so far, is painted.

Besides, the pictures and sculptures of the catacombs should not be considered apart, but must be seen in their relation to history and the testimony of Christian tradition. These writings teach us what were the ideas of the Christians at the time to which the monuments belong, and so they give us the key to determine their meaning. But Christian tradition solemnly attests the cult of Our Lady to be most ancient, therefore the artists who represented her in the catacombs did so with that sentiment of veneration which they felt towards her, and these works of art, for their part, confirm tradition more and more.

But Roller thinks he has found two proofs from the pictures that exclude all possibility of veneration. These are that the figure of the Virgin Mary has no

aureola or halo round her head, and that her expression is in no way divine ! (II, p. 146). It is not worth while keeping the reader's attention even for a short time on these blunders, but it is necessary to make them known so as to give a just idea of the value of this Protestant *Roma Sotterranea*. If the pictures of Our Lady have no halo or nimbus this is just a proof of their age, since anyone who has any idea of Christian archæology knows very well that that distinguishing mark of sanctity was not placed in early times even round the head of Christ, and only gradually did it begin to be used in the fifth century for the person of the Redeemer, and later for all pictures that indicated an authority more than human. For our Lady and the Saints the halo was not used before the sixth century. It was then a change brought about in the natural development of art without implying an intrinsic change of idea ; for if the absence of the halo excluded the idea of veneration, we should have to say that in the first three centuries Christ was not adored by the faithful—which is manifestly absurd. The objection then of Roller to pictures of the Blessed Virgin is childish in its conception, and turns out to be a proof of the antiquity of such representations.

Let us finally pass on to examine the last of the four proposed points, on which our author dilates at length, namely the primacy of the Roman See. This controversial question between us and the Protestants has little connection with the monuments of the Roman catacombs which are exclusively sepulchral. Certainly, we cannot *expect* to find in those underground regions even one picture or inscription which directly refers to

the supremacy of St. Peter and of the Roman See, as Roller requires, because the Christians never had the intention of setting out their whole creed. They executed just those symbols which recalled the Resurrection, the future life, Divine Grace which sustained them in time of persecution, and the Sacraments whence they drew all their courage. So we must be content with finding in ancient Christian art only some allusion to the idea of the authority of the Roman Church, and even if all allusion were missing it would be no wonder ; but we know as a fact that the idea was clear in the minds of the Christians of the first centuries.

That it really was so, the whole of Church history affirms with the most authentic documents. St. Paul himself gave splendid witness to the authority of the Roman Church when he wrote that its faith was celebrated throughout the world. Clement, disciple and successor of St. Peter, spoke with a teacher's authority to the Church of Corinth ; Ignatius of Antioch in the beginning of the second century calls the Church of Rome the "enlightened and blessed church that presides over the others," and St. Irenæus declares it "greatest and most ancient, founded by the Apostles—by her faith we confound all heretics," and adds that it is necessary to have recourse to this Church "because of its primacy" (*Adversus haereses* 3. 3). Tertullian calls her "Happy Church where the Apostles poured out their doctrine with their blood" (*Praescr.* 36). Cyprian calls her "Chief Church, root of the unity of the priesthood, where no error can have admission" (*Ep.* 55). Nor should I ever finish with this list were I to quote all the Fathers of later date, and all the

councils that echo these solemn testimonies. In the face of this outstanding truth, to object that this idea is not attested to by the monuments in the catacombs, besides showing a great ignorance of the spirit of ancient art, of epigraphy, and of the customs of those ages, is merely to narrow the question, and to study archæology without history, and to separate the one from the other—which is absurd.

Roller begins by taking away the very foundation of the primacy of the Holy See, repeating the hoary error that the coming of Peter to Rome is a legend, and hence the tomb of the Apostle in the Vatican is a myth. Many Protestants and rationalists have tried to sustain this thesis, and although in the wrong, seem to have expected to be forgiven their absurd opinion in view of the abundance of their erudition and of the subtlety of penetrating though immoderate criticism. If only Roller had followed their example! But no, he treats so grave a question with unpardonable levity, and passing over the most ancient testimonies to this great truth, sees their origin in the *Liber Pontificalis* which he wrongly attributes to the ninth century. Yet such is the force of the historical arguments in favour of the coming of St. Peter to Rome that this fact has been admitted by the most learned Protestant and rationalist critics such as Hingenfeld, Renan, Wieseler, Delitsch and Mangold as well as by Harnack. But the decisive evidence of the first centuries is either passed over or strangely twisted by Roller, against the most elementary principles of historical criticism. For instance, everybody knows what an important document for the authenticity of the tombs of the

Apostles in Rome is a passage of the priest Caius, who lived at the beginning of the third century, and who, in dispute with a heretic, proposes to him the tombs of Peter and Paul as a proof of the apostolic origin of the Roman Church. "I can show you," he says, "the trophies of the Apostles, for whether you go to the Vatican or on the Ostian Way you will find the graves of those who founded this Church." The original, however, of the text of Caius is lost and the fragments have been preserved to us by Eusebius, the historian of the time of Constantine (*Hist. Eccl.* II, 25). From this circumstance Roller takes occasion to diminish the authority of this document; saying that if these were the words of Eusebius they would be of some value, but they are not because they are the words of a third person. But anybody can see that they carry weight precisely because they are not Eusebius' own, but taken from the writings of a much earlier author. Hence what for Roller destroys the authority of the text quoted, is the very thing that gives it capital importance.

From the tomb of St. Peter he passes on to the examination of the famous chair of the Apostle which is venerated in the Vatican basilica, and here also he tried to disprove the authenticity of this celebrated relic with gratuitous statements, with sophistries and childish objections. But we are dealing here only with dogmatic questions and certain historical monuments, and consequently we leave aside relics: it is possible that the chair in the Vatican is only a symbol. But Roller's argument against the Vatican chair is very curious; for, says he, if the chair had been

known to the ancients they would necessarily have painted it in the catacombs with St. Peter sitting thereon! (II, p. 101). I cannot see under what necessity the early Christians were to represent the Apostle as seated on this chair, and repeat that such an objection springs from a wrong idea that the catacombs must contain a complete exposition of the beliefs, usages, and feelings of the Christians: whereas, as has been said before, we can draw arguments out of what there is in the catacombs, we cannot deny either what there was no reason for expressing, or what for so many reasons has not come down to us. Besides, it is well known that the Apostles are nearly always represented in the catacombs as assembled round Our Saviour, and then He alone is seated *in cathedra.* However there are some pictures and glasses where St Peter and St. Paul are seen seated as distinct from other Apostles.[1] But there is another representation, very famous in Christian art, which has a very much greater value than that of a picture of St. Peter seated *in cathedra*, and this Roller purposely passes over in a few words.

In the symbolic cycle of ancient Christian art the scene of Moses striking the rock with his wand, causing the water to burst forth to quench the thirst of the Jewish people, is very frequent; and this group without doubt alludes to the water of grace which comes from the rock that is Christ, according to the words of St. Paul, "But the rock was Christ." It has been remarked that sometimes in this representation the figure of Moses has the pictorial type that is traditionally attributed

[1] So in a picture of the cemetery of Priscilla the Bishop of Rome is represented with the features of St. Peter and seated *in cathedra.*

to St. Peter, moreover, in some cemetery glasses, above the head of Moses we read clearly the name PETRUS.

In ancient Christian symbolism, then, the figure of Moses meant Peter, who was thus indicated as law-giver and leader of the Christian people as Moses of old had been of the Jewish people. And this idea of the early Christian people was nobly expressed by St. Maximus of Turin (fifth century), who wrote: "Ut in deserto dominico sitienti populo aqua fluxit e petra, ita universo mundo perfidiae ariditate lassato de ore Petri fons salutiferae confessionis emersit":

> "As in the desert to the thirsty people of the Lord water flowed out of the rock, so to the whole world exhausted with the dryness of perfidy, from the mouth of Peter came forth the fount of saving faith."

Such is the value of this allusion, that by itself it would suffice to answer all the calumnies about the so called usurpations of the See of Rome!

But Roller is anxious to make the catacombs speak at all costs against the primacy of Rome, and not knowing where to turn for arguments for his thesis, stops before the inscriptions on the tombs of the third century Popes which were found in the crypt of the pontiffs in the cemetery of Callixtus. "Notice," says he, "how simple are these inscriptions. They have just the name with the title of Bishop ἐπίσκοπος and no more; this is a proof that the Bishops of Rome in the third century were not what they were later, for otherwise we should read on the marble at least the title of Episcopus Maximus! (Chief bishop)" (I, p. 205). It would seem an insult to those who have some idea of ancient Christian epigraphy were I to stop tc prove

the anachronism of such a statement. Besides everyone knows that the title of *episcopus* is the primitive and official title of the popes, and the one they even now use in their most solemn acts.

But Roller realises that this argument has no value, and still keeping to those sepulchral chambers, puts forward another objection that is worth even less than the former. In the crypt of the cemetery of Callixtus besides the popes a few other people were buried; therefore, says Roller, the popes had not then the authority they had later, otherwise such a thing would not have happened—as if their dignity depended on their having a special room for burial—whereas even later on we find that the popes were buried in various places and their graves were adjoining those of others of the faithful.

Having thus run over the chief points of a ponderous work, it is necessary to summarise briefly what we have said and to conclude.

Roller's book is a great miscellany of most various dissertations without connection; what they have of good is taken chiefly from the work of De Rossi and Garrucci. Even the plates of the monuments are copied from those of *Roma Sotterranea* and *Storia dell'arte cristiana*. In his compendium of the writings of these learned men his reasoning is correct if his subject matter has nothing to do with Catholic dogma or tradition, but where he undertakes such questions he becomes sophistical, his religious prejudice blinds him, and makes him fall into the serious errors that we have noticed. He is carried away by the false idea of trying to find in the Christians of the catacombs the precursers

of Protestantism ; and to back up this thesis, historically false as it is, he has accumulated sophistries and unsound conclusions, shutting his eyes to the light which so brilliantly shines from the whole of Christian antiquity. So Roller's book fails in its principal object, of a Protestant interpretation of the ancient monuments ; for there is not a single controversial point of consequence that he scientifically proves for his side, and there is no Catholic dogma confirmed by these monuments against which he is able to adduce serious difficulties deserving examination.

Our conclusion, then, is that the Protestant theory of the Church pure and uncorrupt in the first three centuries, which changed its doctrines in the fourth, cannot stand critical examination ; and that in particular archæology totally opposes such a theory. On the other hand, it is certain that in the catacombs, in so far as is possible, we find the most ancient monuments confirming the present Catholic faith.

After these preliminary remarks on the feebleness of the arguments brought forward by this representative of the Protestant theory of the catacombs, having dealt with the question in general, I think it useful to turn in more detail to the four most important points in our controversies with the Protestants : the Eucharist, the dogma of the Communion of Saints, the cult of the Blessed Virgin, the primacy of the See of Rome. It will therefore be necessary to repeat in the following chapters some of the things I have already said in the first part, but in these chapters the special remarks will be more in detail ; they therefore can be considered as a development of the main argument.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

Besides the Gospels and the Epistles, other texts of very ancient Christian Literature testify to the Faith of the Early Church with respect to the Holy Eucharist. We shall quote them briefly before we begin to examine the monumental evidence of the Catacombs.

The oldest such text is the one last found, the celebrated Doctrine of the Apostles—Διδαχὴ τῶν ἀποστόλων—a manuscript discovered by Briennios in Constantinople in 1883 and supposed by many scholars to date back to the first century. It consists of two parts, of which the first is a catechism of moral commandments and the second a liturgical manual. The latter contains an indication of the Eucharistic Sacrifice as it was offered in the early days of the Church.

The three chapters bearing on the subject are IX, X and XIV. They describe the Eucharistic Liturgy as still combined with the *Agape*, or Banquet, according to the custom of Apostolic times. It was owing to some misbehaviour at these banquets that the Apostle Paul reprimanded the Corinthians, " Have you not houses to eat and drink in ? " " Numquid domos non habetis ad manducandum et bibendum ? " In the passage of the *Didache* there is first a clear allusion

to the Eucharist, and then occur the words, "When you have satisfied yourselves, return thanks." This circumstance affords us a clue to the time when the document was composed, because it is well known that the *Agape*, or Banquet, was altogether separated from the Liturgical Mystery at the very dawn of the second century.

The principal passages of the *Didache* that allude to the Eucharist itself are four in number. The one that deals with the liturgical assemblies reads thus: "Meeting together on the Lord's Day, break bread and return thanks after confessing your sins, that your sacrifice be pure." Then follows a warning against sacrilege, "Give not holy things to dogs," words used by the writers of the second century only in connection with the Holy Eucharist. The third passage is an admonition given shortly before Communion, "Let him who is holy keep firm, and let him who is not repent." Last comes a prayer of thanksgiving, hence the word "Eucharist." "Thou, O Lord, Creator of all things, hast given to mankind food and drink that they may thank Thee, and Thou givest us spiritual Food and Drink and eternal life through Thy Son."

It is to be noted that in this liturgical manual the most essential part of the mystery is lacking, viz., the very Act of Consecration with the solemn words of Our Lord, which St. Paul gives in his epistles and which were repeated by St. Justin a few years later, "This is My Body . . . This is My Blood." Such an omission can only be explained by admitting that the *Didache* is incomplete, or that the most sacred part of the Liturgy was intentionally omitted and must have been usually

repeated by heart. The omission was probably due to the *Disciplina Arcani* or Rule of Secrecy, which had been enforced everywhere at the beginning of the second century and was perhaps practised even before. Athenagoras mentions it as being already an ancient Rule about 177 A.D., and St. Justin presupposes its existence in many passages of his *Apologia*. Even Pliny alludes to it in his letter, when he says that in regard to Christians he felt himself confronted by some deep mystery.

This rule or "discipline of the secret" which aimed at protecting the holiest mysteries of Christianity from the indiscreet curiosity of the Gentiles was carefully observed in the first centuries and lasted until the peace granted by Constantine. But sometimes owing to special circumstances an exception was made to the rule, as when St. Justin staunchly cleared the Christians before the Emperor Antoninus Pius from the foulest charges. On that occasion (A.D. 150-5), he wrote his first *Apologia* containing a detailed description of the liturgical synaxis of his time, indicating the various parts of the ceremony, the prayers, the reading of the Holy Books, the Oblation, the Consecration, the Communion. We learn from it that the Eucharistic Liturgy of the second century was in all its essential points very much like the Mass as it is celebrated in the present day by the Roman Catholics and by the Orthodox.

Other striking allusions, or in many cases clear indications of belief in the Eucharist, are found in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch (107 A.D.), and of Irenæus during the second century, and of Tertullian and Cyprian during the third century. To these

testimonies others could be added derived from the ancient Liturgies belonging to the era of persecution, or from the genuine Acts of the Martyrs, such as those of St. Perpetua who died under Septimius Severus (203 A.D.).

But we must not dwell any longer in the domain of history, but proceed at once to examine the monuments of the first centuries that are still extant and bear on our subject.

The earliest Christian monuments are exclusively connected with sepulchres ; that is to say, they consist of inscriptions placed upon tombs, or of frescoes painted upon the plaster of roughly walled crypts dug in the heart of the *tufo*, or of sarcophagi (stone coffins) adorned with bas-reliefs.

These inscriptions and paintings are mostly symbolical, a fact which presupposes the Rule of Secrecy. Their symbolism can be explained by means of the holy Scriptures or by passages from contemporary Christian writers. All these symbols are based upon one central idea—the idea of bearing witness to the faith and piety of the departed, and of invoking upon them that peace and happiness which they deserved.

The symbolism of ancient Christian art, which shrouded all dogma in mystery, naturally guarded the dogma of the Holy Eucharist even more closely, for this was the most sacred Mystery that the growing Church had to protect from sacrilege in obedience to the clear precept of Christ. Many were the symbols of the Eucharist : the vine, milk, fish, bread.

A very ancient symbol was the vine, which recalls the true vine—*vitis vera*—of the Gospel, and yields

moreover one of the elements of the Eucharist. Paintings of it can be seen in the oldest parts of the Roman Catacombs, such as the vestibule belonging to the Flavian Family (related to the Emperors) in the Cemetery of Domitilla and the crypt of Ampliatus, both of which date back to the first and second centuries. Subsequently, the well known picture of the Good Shepherd afforded an opportunity for another clear symbol of the Eucharist, viz., the Milk which is the mystic food given by the Shepherd to his flock. We see in the cemetery of Callixtus a fine picture of the Good Shepherd bearing a pail of milk which is easily recognised by its colour, and in a neighbouring crypt the pail of milk placed upon an altar between two lambs.

The best illustration of this symbol can be drawn from the Acts of St. Perpetua, a glorious document of early Christian Literature, written at the dawn of the third century (203 A.D.) by the martyr herself while in prison awaiting martyrdom. She relates that, in a vision during sleep, the Heavenly Shepherd appeared to her. In order to prepare her for her approaching martyrdom, He gave her some sweet curdled milk which she ate devoutly while those present said in chorus the liturgical " Amen."

Another precious inscription of which we shall speak has the same symbolism ; it calls the Eucharist " Food as sweet as honey."

But unquestionably the most mystical and solemn symbol is the Fish. It was adopted in the earliest days of Christianity, and used uninterruptedly until the days of peace, but its exact historical origin is uncertain. According to prevalent opinion it was derived from the

Sybilline books in which the Greek word ΙχθύΣ (Fish) is explained with the known acrostic, Ἰησους Χριστός θεοῦ ὑιος Σῶτηρ which means: "Jesus Christ God's Son the Saviour." But the Sybilline book containing that acrostic is now known to have been the work of an Egyptian Jew of the time of Marcus Aurelius, rearranged in the third century by an unknown Christian author, and was only first mentioned by Eusebius and later by St. Augustine and other writers of the fourth century.

But Fish and Bread had already figured upon monuments of much earlier times; and when some of the Fathers refer to that symbol they evidently allude to the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, and to those that Our Lord ate with his disciples after His Resurrection. St. Augustine hints so by the words "Grilled fish represents the passion of Christ . . . *Piscis assus Christus est passus.*" It seems natural therefore, that this symbol should have originated in the memory of those Biblical facts in which Christ Himself gave the Fish as food to his followers.

Perhaps, too, the memory of the fish that restored sight to old Tobias helped in the forming of that symbol. Moreover this combination of light and food agrees very well with the words of St. Prosper of Aquitaine, who wrote of Christ, "Feeding his disciples on the beach from His very Self and offering Himself to the whole world as ἰχθύς (fish) by whose interior remedies we are daily enlightened and fed."—"Satians ex se ipso in littore discipulos et toti se offerens mundo ἰχθύν, . . . cuius ex interioribus remediis quotidie illuminamur et pascimur."

The fish is then the mystical symbol of Christ on the monuments of the first centuries and especially of Christ in the Eucharist. It represents His holy Name when standing alone by itself, or when it completes a phrase of an epigraph. So we read upon a tomb of the ancient cemetery of Priscilla this unfinished expression, ALEXANDER IN . . . after which a fish is represented completing the phrase: ALEXANDER IN CHRISTO.

Another slab found in the Vatican cemetery bears the engraving of a fish with this beautiful inscription on the top, "ΙΧΘΥΣ ΖΩΝΤΩΝ . . . the Fish of the living." In like manner another precious fresco portrays the dolphin interlaced with the trident, a symbol of the Cross, the whole group representing in a veiled manner the crucifixion of Our Lord. Consequently the fish was also used as a symbol of Christians themselves who are the sons of the Divine Fish, and should resemble Him in their deeds. In this line of thought Tertullian wrote in his book upon Baptism that we are "little fish," and in resemblance of the great Fish, Christ, we were born in the water of grace, and in it we must live. "Nos pisciculi secundum ἰχθύν nostrum Jesum Christum in aqua nascimur nec aliter quam in aqua permanendo salvi facti sumus."

Accordingly, tiny fish are sometimes seen painted near an anchor, a symbol of the Cross, expressing by this grouping the Christian's hope of Redemption.

But when fish and bread are shown together they have a more definite meaning, and beyond doubt represent the Eucharist. In this way should be explained the numerous frescoes of the Catacombs which portray the multiplications of bread and fish wrought

by Christ, where we constantly behold baskets set out in an orderly row and filled with the remnants of bread.

This scene is portrayed in a twofold manner; it epresents either the Lord distributing the bread and fish among His disciples, or the later banquet in which He and they eat bread and grilled fish. This last scene is sometimes coupled with another representing Baptism. (Fig. 1).

The number of the disciples represented in the picture does not agree with history. It proves therefore its merely symbolical meaning, viz., that of a Eucharistic Communion. A similar idea is also clearly expressed upon the sarcophagus discovered at Arles, in which, near the scene of the miraculous multiplication of bread, a table is shown with fish upon it. This cannot surely be an historical accessory to the main fact related by the Bible. It unquestionably indicates the Eucharistical meaning of the group.

The guests present at these suppers are almost always seven in number. This detail reminds us of those seven disciples whom St. John relates as having dined with Jesus on the beach of the lake of Tiberias after His Resurrection. Sometimes the guests are even painted nude in order to show plainly that they were fishermen just out of their boats after a whole night's fishing, as related in the Gospel. Indeed this detail of the seven guests and their baskets filled with loaves of bread affords us a means of distinguishing the cemeterial paintings representing the Eucharistic Supper, from those that symbolise the Heavenly Banquet in which the guests are of no fixed number and the other accessories are wanting.

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Another equally interesting symbol, but one seldom met with in the catacombs, is that of the miraculous changing of water into wine performed at the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee. This is also a figure of the Eucharistic Banquet and of the sacramental transformation. It is seen in two frescoes of the Cemetery of SS. Peter and Marcellinus in connection with the Heavenly Banquet of which the Eucharist is an infallible pledge, and also upon some sarcophagi.

But if the dogma of the Eucharist is so frequently asserted in the scenes just shown, it is even more clearly and more solemnly attested in some other special and very striking pictures, which deserve a longer examination.

The foremost for its antiquity is a group twice repeated in a cubiculum of the cemetery of Callixtus on the Via Appia in that very ancient part of it, called by De Rossi the Crypt of Lucina, which was the starting point of the whole cemetery. This fresco dates back at least to the early decades of the second century and is by the same hand that painted the other frescoes of truly Pompeian style.

It consists of a fish bearing on its back an osier basket filled with loaves of bread, amidst which one can clearly trace a small glass containing red wine. It is evident that the multiplication of loaves here represented foreshadows the Eucharist and that the element of the wine, which has nothing to do with the said miracle, gives to the group its full Eucharistic significance. (Figs. 2, 3).

This group not only contains an allusion to the Eucharist but it is a true and definite declaration of

the Christian belief in Christ's Real Presence therein, inasmuch as the material joining of the fish and the basket containing the Eucharistic Elements expresses very clearly the compenetration of the Sacred Species with Jesus Christ Himself.

De Rossi was of opinion that the Fish of Lucina's Crypt had been painted as if it were alive and swimming in the water bearing the basket on its back so as to portray " the true bread and fish of the living water "—*Panis verus et aquae vivae piscis*—mentioned by St. Paulinus of Nola. Others hold that the fish was meant to be outside the water. But, whatever be the correct opinion on this point, the Eucharistic meaning of the group remains unchanged. It may be added that the reed basket and the crystal bowl painted in the Crypt of Lucina are a matter-of-fact reproduction of the way in which the Eucharist was conveyed out of doors during the first century, and remind one of a passage of St. Jerome addressed to Rusticus, " Nothing more rich than he who carries the Body of the Lord in an osier basket and His Blood in a glass "—*Nihil illo ditius quam qui corpus Domini in canistro portat vimineo et sanguinem eius in vitro.*

And now within this very cemetery of Callixtus, the largest of the Roman catacombs, let us turn our attention to the crypts called after the Sacraments, and examine a series of remarkable paintings dating certainly not later than the beginning of the third century.

These valuable frescoes follow each other in an admirably logical sequence, which was probably suggested to the painter by some ecclesiastic.

In the first fresco Moses is portrayed striking water out of the rock in the desert, giving us an image of the Church, which from the mystical rock—Jesus Christ—the origin of all the Sacraments, draws the water of grace. The mystical Fisherman extracts a small fish from the pool of gushing water—a reference to Baptism. Then another symbol of Baptism follows: the figure of the paralytic man healed at the pond called Probatica.

The next two scenes painted in the neighbouring cubiculum are an allusion to the great Eucharistic Mystery. In the central one, seven persons are banqueting with baskets full of bread in front of them. They eat bread and fish and represent the faithful, who having been previously purified by the waters of grace, now sit at the Banquet of the divine Lamb. (Fig. 4).

The Eucharistic meaning of this picture is enhanced by the other picture at its left hand side, which remains unique of its kind to this day. (Fig. 5).

It portrays a personage wearing the pallium and standing in front of a tripod, upon which are placed a loaf of bread and a fish. The man stretches his right hand towards the food in an evident act of Consecration. On the other side of the tripod a woman stands with her arms uplifted in the act of prayer.

The meaning of this group is clear. It portrays the Eucharistic Sacrifice in the very moment of Consecration when the bread becomes ἰχθύς, the Body of *Christ, Son of God, the Saviour*. The woman on the right is supposed by some scholars to represent the soul of the lady buried in that cubiculum, as it is well known

that figures in the act of prayer often represent the souls of the departed. But such an attitude would be too striking for a private person.

The artist clearly meant to denote the Church, which also was often symbolised by the figure of a praying woman. The Church is represented as lifting up her prayers from the Altar of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. This corresponds with the teaching of St. Cyprian, who wrote that the most efficacious prayers are those offered in the presence of the Holy Eucharist. The sacrificial significance of this fresco is moreover confirmed by another scene painted on the opposite wall. It represents Abraham's sacrifice, which was a symbol of the great Sacrifice of the Redemption.

If we pass from this important crypt into the adjoining one, we shall see another group well deserving our full attention.

In a semi-circular painting on the upper portion of the wall the same tripod is seen repeated. It bears a loaf of bread and a fish placed in front of the seven baskets which recall the miraculous multiplication. I think that the prominent way in which the bread and the fish are placed upon the table as upon an altar certainly indicate the Eucharistic Species already consecrated and prepared for the use of the communicants. To my mind the whole scene suggests the idea of worship.

Another remarkable work discovered some years ago in the cemetery of Priscilla should be added to the list of precious paintings described with such great erudition by De Rossi and by other archæologists.

This is the fresco that can be seen at the end of a large crypt adorned with other early paintings. From its position and its style it is supposed to be a work of the early part of the second century. (Fig. 7).

A circular table covered by a cloth occupies most of the scene. It bears two dishes, one containing some loaves of bread, the other a fish. Six guests sit at the table, five men and a veiled woman. At the head of the table on the left a seventh and bearded personage is seated, who stretches both his hands over the table in the act of breaking bread, while a chalice of wine is set in front of him. The customary seven baskets are placed round the table. This detail makes it clear that the repast is a Eucharistic Supper; and so the whole group can be easily explained. The bearded personage in this novel attitude is the priest or bishop, the προεστός or president mentioned by Justin; the "Senior" or "Elder" in the language of Tertullian, who presides over the liturgical meetings and fulfils the rite of the "*fractio panis*" (the breaking of the bread), the pre-eminently Eucharistic rite mentioned in the *Acts of the Apostles* and in the *Epistles of St. Paul.* The other six persons are the faithful assisting at the Sacred Liturgy, who are ready to partake of the bread changed into ἰχθύς (fish) and to drink the Chalice of Salvation.

This painting is valuable both for its antiquity and for the novelty of its composition; and one may well say that it depicts the Eucharistic Liturgy of the second century which was celebrated in that very crypt or sanctuary of the catacombs of Priscilla. But it does

not portray it entirely as it was actually carried out, but rather in a symbolical manner, including, however, one practical detail. I allude to the figure of the man who is breaking bread. Indeed it cannot be admitted that the Eucharistic Liturgy and the *Agape* were still celebrated together in the second century, as this painting figures it; for that custom had already died out during the early years of that century and the very presence of the baskets and of the loaves suffices to give a symbolical meaning to the whole scene.

This valuable painting is really another representation of the Holy Sacrifice. It differs from the corresponding one of the cemetery of Callixtus, both by being of an earlier date and by the addition of the liturgical act performed by the priest. If the former exhibits the Act of Consecration, the latter shows the moment of Communion.[1]

After such remarkable monuments minor ones seem scarcely worth mentioning; but in order to complete my task I will bestow a few lines on them.

Loaves of bread and fish are often engraved upon sepulchral slabs in the catacombs, always with the same Eucharistic meaning. Sometimes they are meant to express the yearnings of the faithful for the Holy Eucharist. Thus, upon a tombstone of the third century in Modena, fish are seen swarming towards some loaves of bread marked with the sign of the Cross. The same thought is more generally expressed by a dove flying towards the symbolical vase or picking a bunch of the mystical grapes.

[1] Wilpert discovered and described this picture. See *Fractio Panis* &c. (1894).

These Eucharistic emblems in the Roman catacombs not only agree with the expressions of the ecclesiastical writers but are moreover strikingly confirmed by two celebrated inscriptions, belonging one to the Eastern and the other to the Western Church.

The former is the sepulchral inscription of Abercius bishop of Hieropolis in Phrygia during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Its text was already known through the Acts of that Saint published by Metaphrastes and the Bollandists. Two fragments of this epigraph were discovered some years ago and are now preserved in the Christian section of the Lateran Museum.

I should wander too far from my theme if I were to discuss here at length this famous monument and treat of all the recent controversies regarding it. They can be read in several books and pamphlets published by myself and other writers. I will only add that all efforts to prove a pagan origin of this epigraph have proved quite futile. We may, like De Rossi, continue to consider it the queen of all Christian inscriptions. (Fig. 6).

This inscription of Abercius is of great importance with regard to many points of Catholic dogma; but it is specially so with regard to the Eucharist. I quote here a partial translation of it:

"I am Abercius, the disciple of the immaculate Shepherd, Who tends His flocks on the hills and in the valleys, Who has great all-seeing eyes. He taught me the doctrine of life and He sent me to Rome to behold a Kingdom and a Queen robed in gold and with golden

shoes, and there I beheld a nation adorned with a splendid sign. And I saw the hills of Syria and Nisibis beyond the Euphrates. And everywhere I met brethren gathered together. And Faith was ever my guide and fed me with the Great Fish that the pure Virgin drew from the fount and gave to eat to her friends, having also excellent wine and administering to them a mixture of wine together with bread."

Who will not recognise in this passage of Abercius that same guiding thought that inspired the painters of the Roman catacombs to represent in different ways the loaves of bread, the fish and the goblet of wine? Who in reading this poem will not be reminded of the fresco in the catacomb of Callixtus representing the Consecration of the Eucharist, in which bread and fish are set upon the table, and where the woman who symbolises the Church may also be regarded as a symbol of Faith regaling Christians with Divine Food according to the words of Abercius?

The same symbolical language is used in another contemporary epigraph discovered long before at Autun in Gaul (the ancient Augustodunum). A Christian named Pectorius, the author of the inscription, addresses his fellow Christians calling them sons of the heavenly ἰχθύς, urging them to purify themselves in the waters of divine grace and to nourish themselves with the Eucharistic Food.

"O divine off-spring of the Heavenly Fish, maintain an unpolluted heart and receive here among mortals the immortal source of waters. O friend, heal thy soul with the water, dispenser of wisdom. Receive the food

as sweet as honey of the Saviour of the Saints, eat with an intense desire, holding the Fish in thy hands."

These admirable words express the same order of ideas which we have been commenting upon, and recall to our minds the waters of grace painted upon the cubicula (funeral chapels) of St. Callixtus together with the Eucharistic Fish and the sweet Milk that St. Perpetua beheld in her dream. They faithfully portray the very act of Communion as it was carried out during the first centuries when communicants received the Eucharistic Food in their hands.

These inscriptions of Abercius and Pectorius correspond wonderfully with the monuments in the Roman catacombs, and prove the identity of belief in the Holy Eucharist that united the Eastern and Western Churches of the second century. Abercius had perhaps seen with his own eyes those very paintings we have described or similar ones, and had been present at the gatherings of the faithful in the crypts that contained them.

This leads me to say a few words about the Eucharistic synaxis or assembly in the Roman catacombs.

It is beyond doubt that from the earliest times the Sacred Liturgy was performed upon the tombs of the martyrs.

The *Acts of St. Polycarp*, written shortly after his death, which happened in 155 A.D., bear clear witness to it; they mention the sacrifice that was to be offered upon his tomb on the anniversary of his death. So do several other Acts of Martyrs. But even if historical documents were silent on this subject, the Roman

catacombs would suffice to prove the assertion, as they contain a number of crypts of every type, where gatherings were held during the era of persecution and after. Christians were wont to meet there freely even before the time of Constantine, as we may be sure from the fact that during the first three centuries they had full control and unhampered possession of their cemeteries. These were under the strict protection of the Roman Laws, which made the possession of all sepulchres sacred and inviolable. But there were some exceptions to the rule, and under Valerian in 258 A.D. and later under Diocletian, the catacombs were confiscated, although even then the Christians persisted in their pious habit of gathering together and praying in their cemeteries. However the brutality of their persecutors overtook them in their retreats. In the cemetery on the Via Salaria, where lies the tomb of SS. Chrysanthus and Daria, the Mass of the martyrs was interrupted by the martyrdom of the faithful there assembled; and in the cemetery on the Via Appia, Pope Sixtus II was seized by the imperial soldiers while he was officiating seated on his throne, and was sentenced to die on the very spot where he had called together his flock. There the holy Levite Lawrence hastened to meet him, and was told by the old Pope that he too would presently die the glorious death of a martyr.

Probably, during one of these gatherings forbidden by Valerian, that memorable communion was held within the catacombs which occasioned the death of Tarsicius, the first martyr of the Eucharist. It was on the Via Appia, the road so often trodden by the triumphant Roman Conquerors, that this young acolyte,

while on his way to the prisons to carry there the holy Eucharist to the confessors, was seized by the mob. But he chose rather to die than surrender the Divine Mysteries to the idolators. Thus he deserved the high praise that the great Pope Damasus caused to be engraved upon his tomb :

Christ's secret gifts by good Tarsicius borne,
The mob profanely bade him to display,
He rather gave his own limbs to be torn
Than Christ's celestial to mad dogs betray.

(*Translated by Cardinal Wiseman*).

Tarsicium sanctum Christi sacramenta gerentem,
Cum male sana manus peteret vulgare profanis,
Ipse animam potius voluit dimittere caesus
Prodere quam canibus rabidis coelestia membra.

By these words the poet-pope of the fourth century (A.D. 366—82), solemnly attested the belief of the Church in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, since he called the Sacramental Species the "Limbs of Christ"—*coelestia membra.*

This inscription also proves in a forcible manner that the Early Church acknowledged Christ to be actually present in the Eucharist, not only at the moment of Communion, but also long after Consecration when It was carried far from the spot where the Sacred Liturgy had been performed. The Church of Rome still holds the same doctrine as of old in this respect.

These ceremonies by the underground tombs of the Martyrs continued to be performed after the peace granted by Constantine. Gorgeous basilicas were indeed built above ground ; but the pious custom

of holding liturgical gatherings in the crypts was still continued. Prudentius, who visited the Roman cemeteries at the end of the fourth century, describes the crypt of St. Hippolytus on the Via Tiburtina, and points to the Altar where the Holy Sacrament was given to the communicants.

The Table where the Sacrament is given and which
Keeps a faithful guard over a martyr's bones,
Preserves these for the hope of eternal judgement
And with holy food nourishes the citizens by the Tiber.

Illa Sacramenti donatrix mensa eademque
Custos fida sui martyris apposita,
Servat ad aeterni spem iudicis ossa sepulcri
Pascit idem sanctis tybricolas dapibus.

The poet alludes in these lines to the crowd of visitors who thronged the underground cemeteries. Here and there on the plaster they used to scratch their names, mingled with prayers and acclamations which bear witness to their fervent piety even to this day.

But, after a lapse of centuries, it became necessary to remove the relics of those athletes of the Christian Faith ; and for safety's sake to transfer them to the basilicas of Rome. Consequently the devout pilgrimages to them came to an end ; the catacombs were forsaken ; and as, for more than ten centuries, no religious ceremonies were held in the crypts, they fell to ruins.

Only in our days have the forgotten tombs of so many martyrs again been happily restored to veneration, and the Eucharistic Oblation and Communion are renewed within those walls that beheld the gatherings of the early centuries.

In every part of those revered sanctuaries and under different forms and allegories dating from the days of the Apostles, one beholds a fervent devotion to the Holy Eucharist and the ardent desire of Christian noble hearts for that mystical Food. It is clear from the array of their monuments, and from their succession, that the dogma of the Eucharist has come down to us intact from the Apostolic Age, and that the Sacred Mysteries were not regarded by the ancient Christians as a mere memorial of the Last Supper, but as the centre of their worship, the soul of Christian life, the principal light of the Church, the Body and Divinity of the Lord.

The present Mass is only an elaborated form of those primitive liturgies, and is in substance the same as in the days of the Apostles and of St. Justin. It has merely taken new forms according to different times and different countries. The beautiful varieties of the Eastern and Western Rites of the Catholic Church, and those of the Eastern separated Churches, all of very ancient date and substantial agreement, prove the early and common origin of the dogma regarding the Real Presence in the Eucharist.

CHAPTER II.

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.[1]

PRAYERS FOR THE DEPARTED AND THE INVOCATION OF THE HOLY SOULS.

BELIEF in this article of the Christian Faith is solemnly attested by the ancient sepulchral inscriptions, some of which contain prayers on behalf of the departed and others appeal directly to them.

The following one shows that inscriptions were engraved on tombs in order that passers-by might remember to pray for the departed.

D·P·

LUCIFERE · COIUGI · DULCISSIME · OMNEN
DULCITUDINEM · CUM · LUCTUM · MAXIME
MARITO · RELIQUISSET · MERUIT · TITULUM
INSCRIBI · UT · QUISQUE · DE · FRATRIBUS · LE
GERIT · ROGET · DEUM · UT · SANCTO · ET · INNOCENTI ·
SPIRITO · AD · DEUM · SUSCIPIATUR.
QUE · VIXIT · ANNUS · XXI · MES · VIII · DIES · VX.

[1] The inscriptions reproduced in this chapter are from my *Manuale di epigrafia cristiana*, published in the Hœpli series.

The reader will find in this manual a treatise on Christian epigraphy and a very useful collection of 491 ancient inscriptions arranged in groups in such a way as to illustrate the dogma and discipline of the early Church and its organization, as well as of early Christian society.

Milan, Ulric Hœpli, 1910.

For a collection of large photographs of ancient Christian inscriptions, many of which have a dogmatic value, see the *folio* volume, published by Hœpli, Milan, 1910. I monumenti del museo cristiano Pio-Lateranense, by Orazio Marucchi. (Work dedicated to Pius X).

" . . . She deserved to have this inscription that whosoever of the brethren should read it might pray to God to take unto Himself this holy and innocent soul."—(Lateran Museum).

This other versified inscription is still *in situ* in the cemetery of Priscilla and is not later than the beginning of the third century.

EUCHARIS · EST · MATER · PIUS · ET · PATER · EST · *mihi*
VOS · PRECOR · O · FRATRES · ORARE
HUC · QUANDO · VEN*itis* | ET · PRECIBUS · TOTIS
PATREM · NATUMQUE · ROCATIS | SIT · VESTRAE
MENTIS · AGAPES · CARAE · MEMINISSE | UT · DEUS
OMNIPOTENS · AGAPEN · IN · SAECULA · SERVET

" Eucharis is my mother and Pius my father. O Brethren when you assemble here together to implore and to pray to the Father and to the Son, I entreat you to make remembrance of dear Agape that Almighty God may take her for ever to His Glory." The poet makes the departed lady address the brethren who come to pray in the cemetery.

This inscription alone, which is very ancient, suffices to prove that liturgical gatherings were held in the cemeteries, and definitely refutes the thesis of those who deny that the Early Church offered prayers for the departed. It proves indeed that public and solemn prayers were offered for them as far back as the second century in that oldest of Roman cemeteries which still resounded with the voices of the Apostles. Other inscriptions, belonging to the third and fourth centuries, abundantly confirm the same point. At that period the faith of Christians could certainly

not be contrary to that of the Early Church on such a vital point. The following inscription contains a phrase belonging without doubt to some liturgical prayer on behalf of the departed.

IN · PA*ce*
SPIRIT*us*
SILVA*ni*
AMEN.

" In peace be the soul of Silvanus.—Amen."—(Cemetery of Callixtus).

This next inscription is partly in Greek and partly in Latin. Both parts, however are written in Greek letters.

ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙC · ΕΤ · ΛΕΟΝΤΙΑ
CΕΙΡΙΚΕ · ΦΕΙΛΙΕ · ΒΕΝΕΜΕΡΕΝ
ΤΙ · ΜΝΗCΘΗC · ΙΗCΟΥC
Ο · ΚΥΡΙΟC · ΤΕΚΝΟΝ . . . . .

" . . . O Lord Jesus remember our daughter."—(Cemetery of Domitilla.

The most usual prayer for the departed was that embodied in the formula IN PACE. But another and more solemn one was often used, viz., REFRIGERIUM, which clearly expresses the idea of solace from pain.

This formula is met with in many different forms. Sometimes we find the simple words IN REFRIGERIUM, but in other instances they are coupled with the more common one, IN PACE.

We also meet with the following : " Deus tibi refrigeret, Deus refrigeret spiritum tuum—Refrigera—Bene refrigera," which mean : " God give thee rest " : " God give rest to thy spirit " : " Get rest " : " Mayest thou get good rest."

The dogmatic meaning of the word *Refrigerium* can be set out more clearly still from a very precious hagiographic document, namely, "The Authentic and Ancient Acts of the Martyrdom of St. Perpetua, 203 A.D."

These acts consist of three parts. The first is an introduction written probably by a Deacon or a Notary of the Church of Carthage, and concerns the fellow-prisoners and fellow-martyrs of the Saint; the second, written by the martyr herself, is a diary of her imprisonment; the third tells the story of her martyrdom and is by the author of the first part, who concludes by testifying that the second part was written by the very hand of Perpetua. These Acts relate in a naïve way all the events that happened to her and to her fellow-prisoners from the day they were sent to prison until the day of their martyrdom. They contain also the visions which Perpetua had during her imprisonment.

In the first of these visions after the usual phrase, "*et ostensum est mihi hoc*"—"This was shown to me,"—she relates that she beheld a ladder reaching up to heaven, bristling at the sides with weapons and guarded at the base by a dragon. She dared not climb it, but Satyrus her companion encouraged her and presently she did so and alighted in a beautiful garden, where a venerable Man, hoary-headed, was milking. When He saw her, He signed to her to come near, and when she had done so He gave her a small piece of curdled milk—sicut buccella—which she received between her lips with folded hands, while all present in the garden said Amen. After that, Perpetua writes, she awoke

and tasted in her mouth a sweetness she had never before experienced. These last words contain an evident allusion to the Eucharist. A few days after this vision she says, " While we were all praying, the name of my younger brother Dinocrates escaped my lips, he who had died shortly before at the age of seven from a cancer on his face. I was astonished, she goes on to say, that I had forgotten him until then. I was very penitent and we all began together to pray for him. Shortly after I had another vision. I saw Dinocrates emerging from a very dark place, looking very pale and with a ghastly wound upon his face, which was marred by it. He was sad and depressed and wandered about as if in great distress. A deep chasm separated us so that I could give him no aid. There was a fountain in the same place and Dinocrates, who seemed very thirsty, tried to quench his thirst, but could not do so as the brim of the basin was high and he was small. By this I understood that he was in a place of penance. Upon this I awoke and bethought myself at once of my brother who was in pain, but I was confident that my prayers would solace him; and immediately we began praying for him until we were taken to the amphitheatre, into a new prison to await there the birthday of Geta, the Emperor's son." The third vision took place a few days later and was as follows: " The same place appeared to me, but transformed into a charming garden, bright with light, and Dinocrates was there, happy and content, playing about in a white garment. The fountain had a much lower brim than before and at it Dinocrates frequently refreshed himself (*et vidi Dinocratem refrigerantem*), while a golden phial full of

water was set upon the margin of the basin." "Then," concludes Perpetua, "I awoke and understood that Dinocrates had been released from pain and was enjoying eternal bliss."

There is certainly not another document in the whole of ancient Christian literature that expresses more forcibly belief in Purgatory and the efficacy of prayers for the repose of the departed.

Whatever may be one's opinion about St. Perpetua's visions, even if considered as mere dreams, it is beyond question that they express the convictions of Perpetua and of all other Christians living in the early years of the third century (203 A.D.), concerning the dogma of Purgatory; and these convictions could not have sprung into existence in her time but were derived from traditions of the second century closely interlocked with the very origins of Christianity. In the presence of such solemn and authentic documents, we are bound to admit that the Early Church held in this respect the same doctrine that the Church of Rome holds now-a-days.

The idea of *refrigerium* appears also in many sepulchral inscriptions, sometimes as an augury of well-being, and sometimes as a prayer to God on behalf of the departed.

Here follows a very ancient specimen.

PRIVATA · DULCIS
IN · REFRIGERIO
ET · IN · PACE.

"O sweet Privata, mayest thou be in solace and in peace,"—(Cemetery of Priscilla.)

Other examples.

PARENTES · *fi*LIO
BONOSO · FECERUNT
BENEMERENTI · IN
PACE · ET · IN · REFRI
GERIV . . . . . .
QUI · VIXIT · ANN.

"His parents made this on behalf of their son Bonosus imploring for him peace and solace."—(Cemetery of St. Hermes).

AMERIMNUS
RUFINAE · COIU
GI · CARISSIME
BENEMEREN
TI · SPIRITUM
TUUM · DEUS
REFRIGERET

"Amerimnus to his beloved and good wife Rufina, may God grant thee refrigerium (rest)."—(Lateran Museum).

BOLOSA · DEUS · TI
BI · REFRIGERET · QUAE · VI
XIT · ANNOS · XXXI · RECESSIT
DIE · XIII · KAL · OCTB · ☧

"O Bolosa may God grant thee solace."—(Lateran Museum).

POSUI*t* · *hip*ERECHIUS
COIUGI · ALBINULE
BENEMERENTI · SIC
UT · SPIRITUM · TUUM · DE
US · REFRIGERET.

" Hiperechius placed this to his good wife Albinula, that God may grant refrigerium (rest) to thy soul.' —(Cemetery of Priscilla).

It appears from this phrase that the inscription was placed there in order to obtain solace for the departed wife, a thought that can only be explained by the fact that the epigraph gave to the passers-by an opportunity to pray for her soul.

DULCISSIMO
ANTISTHENI
CONIUGI·SUO
REFRIGERIUM.

"Solace (refrigerium) to her sweet husband."—(Cemetery of Priscilla).

S. O.
*dulci*SSIMO
. . . *fil*IO
. . . *p*ATER
SPIRITUM·TUUM
DEUS·REFRIGERET.

" To his sweet son, by his father . . . may God refresh thy soul." (Cemetery of St. Agnes).

The prayer for refrigerium or solace has been preserved in the Catholic Church and she still offers prayers for the departed in the Canon of the Mass, " To these, O Lord, and to all those who rest in Christ, we beg Thee to grant a place of *refrigerium*, light and peace."

This prayer has been repeated for centuries by the Greek Church in her liturgy ; which proves that the belief of the Eastern Churches before their separation from Rome was identical on this point with that of Rome herself.

This is the prayer in the Office for the Dead in the Greek ritual.

Ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων
ἀνάπαυσον καὶ τὴν Ψυχὴν τοῦ
κεκοιμημένου δούλου σου ἐν
τόπῳ φωτεινῷ ἐν τόπῳ χλοερῷ
ἐν τόπῳ ἀνάΨύξεως ἔνδα απέδρα
πᾶσα ὀδύνη λύπη και στεναγμός

It implores that the soul of the departed may be welcomed in a place of refrigerium, where there is no longer any pain.

But as the dogma of the Communion of Saints bids us also believe that the departed can fruitfully pray for the living, so in other inscriptions we find forms of prayers addressed to the departed begging them to intercede for their survivors.

Here are some examples.

IANUARIA BENE REFRIGERA
ET ROGA PRO NOS (SIC).

"O Januaria mayest thou find sure refrigerium and pray for us."—(Cemetery of Callixtus).

. . . . . .

VIBAS
IN PACE ET PETE
PRO NOBIS

"Live in peace and pray for us."—(Cemetery of Domitilla).

Often only intercession on behalf of the living is invoked.

SABBATI DULCIS
ANIMA PETE ET RO
GA PRO FRATRES ET
SODALES TUOS (SIC).

"O Sabbatius, sweet soul, pray for thy brethren and friends."—(Cemetery of Gordianus on the Via Latina).

Remark the term "fratres et sodales," to denote Christians.

ATTICE SPIRITUS TUUS
IN BONO ORA PRO PAREN
TIBUS TUIS.

"O Atticus, may thy soul be in bliss and do thou pray for thy parents."—(Cemetery of Callixtus).

ΔΙΟΝΥCΙΟC · ΝΗΠΙΟC · ΑΚΑΚΟC · ΔΕΝΘΑ · ΔΕΚΕΙ · ΤΕ · ΜΕΤΑ · ΤΩΝ ΑΓΙΩΝ · ΜΝΗCΚΕCΘΕ · ΔΕ · ΚΑΙ · ΗΜΩΝ · ΕΝ · ΤΑΙC · ΑΓΙΑIC ΥΜΩΝ · ΠΡΕΥΧΑIC · ΚΑΙ · ΤΟΥ · ΓΛΥΨΑΤΟC · ΚΑΙ · ΓΡΑΨΑΝΤΟC

"Dionysius, an innocent child, rests here among saints. Remember in thy holy prayers both the sculptor and the writer."—(Cemetery of Callixtus), National Museum.

ATTICE
DORMI IN PACE
DE TUA INCOLUMITATE
SECURUS ET PRO NOSTRIS
PECCATIS PETE SOLLICITUS.

"O Atticus, sleep in peace in the security of thy salvation and pray earnestly for our sins."—(Capitol Museum).

In a similar way St. Cyprian writes in his book: *De Mortalitate*, Chap. IX: "Magnus illic nos carorum

numerum expectat, parentum fratrum filiorum frequens nos et copiosa turba desiderat, jam de sua incolumitate secura et adhuc de nostra sollicita."

" There a great number of our dear ones wait for us, fathers and brothers and sons are longing for us, who being already assured of their own safety are mindful of ours."

The following inscription is very interesting; it contains the theological reason for our hope in the efficacy of the prayers of the departed on behalf of the living—namely, that the departed are already among the blessed in Heaven.

GENTIANUS FIDELIS IN PACE
QUI VIXIT ANNIS XII MENS VIII
DIES XVI ET IN ORATIONIS TUIS (SIC)
ROGES PRO NOBIS QUIA SCIMUS
TE IN ☧

" Because we know that thy soul is in Christ."

(Lateran Museum).

The custom of invoking the prayers of the dead for the living, and the confidence placed in their intercession, is the origin of the Cult of the Saints; who were men like ourselves and whom we invoke and revere in a special degree on account of their heroic virtues.

In early times this cult referred almost exclusively to martyrs, but later it was extended to confessors, who were venerated in the same degree.

CHAPTER III.

THE CULT OF THE SAINTS IN ANCIENT INSCRIPTIONS AND IN FIGURES ON THE MONUMENTS.

The custom of commemorating martyrs is very ancient and we find it mentioned even as far back as the second century in the letter written by the Church of Smyrna to that of Lyons in the same year as the martyrdom of St. Polycarp, 155 A.D.

Martyrs were considered as the protectors of and intercessors for the departed before the Throne of God, and this is clearly expressed in an old inscription in which the martyrs are called *advocati* : *i.e.*, advocates.

CUIQUE PRO VITAE SUAE TESTIMONIO SANCTI
MARTYRES APUD DEUM ET CHRISTUM ERUNT
ADVOCATI. . . .

"The holy martyrs will be advocates for every one before God and Christ."—(Cemetery of Ciriaca).

The monuments of the catacombs are in keeping with this thought ; sometimes they represent the departed as already in the presence of Christ the Judge, and being defended and protected by the local martyrs ; at other times we see them escorted by these martyrs before the Divine Judge. This thought is well expressed in the following epigraph in the city of Vercelli, which ends with the words :

. . . . O FELIX GEMINO MERUIT
QUI MARTYRE DUCI AD DOMINUM MELIORE
VIA REQUIEMQUE MERERI ! . . . .

See Bruzza : *Iscrizioni Vercellesi* (1874), p. 319.

It refers to a priest buried near the saints, for whom

the intercession of the martyrs Nazarius and Victor is invoked and of whom it is said "Happy he who deserved to be accompanied by the two martyrs before the Lord to obtain eternal rest."

A fine illustration of this phrase is to be seen in a painting of the catacombs of St. Hermes, which represents a departed soul standing in an attitude of prayer between two martyrs, in the presence of Christ, Who is seated on His Throne as Judge.

The following epitaph is also inspired by the thought of commending the souls of the departed to the care of the Saints, in order that they may accompany them to heaven.

PAULO · FILIO · MERENTI · IN · PA
CEM · TE · SUSCIPIANT · OMNIUM · ISPIRI
TA · SANCTORUM · QUI · VIXIT · ANNOS · II · DIES · N · L

"To my good son Paul, that the spirits of all the saints may welcome thee in peace."—(Originally in Rome, but now in the museum Del Bagno in Carseoli).

This prayer is still in use in the burial service of the Catholic Church: "suscipiant te martyres"—"May the martyrs welcome thee."

The idea of welcome given by the saints to the departed is also represented in some paintings of the cemeteries, as in the following fresco in the catacombs of Domitilla (Fig. 8).

There St. Petronilla is represented as greeting a matron named Veneranda and accompanying her to heaven. She is seen embracing the matron and showing her the Books of the Gospel.[1]

[1] See my *Eléments d'archéologie chrétienne* (Desclée) vols. 1, 2, 3, also my *Manuale di archeologia cristiana* (Desclée, 1908) pp. 343–5.

She is identified by her name : PETRONELLA MARTYR.

In another painting of the catacombs of Ciriaca, the saints are shown lifting the curtains of the tabernacles in order to introduce the soul of the departed into heaven.

The following inscription also is inspired by the hope that the departed may be received into the company of the saints.

AGATAMERIS · SPI
RITUM · TUUM · INTER
SANCTOS.

"O Agatameris may thy soul be with the saints."—(Cemetery of Callixtus). (The little bird is the symbol of the soul).

We meet also with prayers addressed directly to the martyrs that they may welcome the departed into heaven, as in the following inscriptions.

. . . *ben*EMERENTI · IN · PACE · QUAE · VIXIT
ANNIS · XXX · MESIS · SE
. . . KAL · SEPTEMBRIS · SANCTE · LAURENTI.
SUSCEPTA · HABETO · ANIMAM · EJUS

"O St. Lawrence Martyr receive her soul."—(Cemetery of Ciriaca, now in the Naples Museum).

So too from the ancient city of Preneste in a beautiful metrical inscription, which dates from the time of Constantine, we read that the local martyr Agapitus is invoked to welcome a youth into heaven.

. . . *hunc* · *suscep*TUM · HABEAS · AGAPITE · SANCTE
ROGAMUS.

" . . . We beseech thee, saintly Agapitus, to welcome him into heaven."—(Cathedral of Palestrina).

The title of saint used here is more recent than that of *dominus* or *domnus*, which is found in other inscriptions.

In another inscription the title of *domna* is given to the martyr Basilla, to whose patronage several departed souls are commended.

DOMINA · BASILLA · COM
MANDAMUS · TIBI · CRES
CENTINUS · ET · MICINA
FILIA · NOSTRA · . . . .

"To thee, Lady Basilla, we commend Crescentius and Micina our daughter."—(Lateran Museum).

Martyrs were begged to obtain refrigerium or rest for the souls of the departed brethren, as in the following inscriptions.

REFRIGERET · JANUARIUS · AGATOPUS · FELICISSI
MUS · MARTYRES.

"May the martyrs Januarius, Agatopus and Felicissimus give thee refrigerium (rest)."

Graffito, scratched on the plaster of a loculus (grave) in the cemetery of Pretextatus

REFRIGERET · TIBI · DEUS · ET · CHRISTUS
ET · DOMINI · NOSTRI · ADEODATUS
ET · FELIX

"May God and Christ and the martyrs Felix and Adeodatus solace thee."

Inscription scratched on the plaster of a tomb cavity in the cemetery of Commodilla.

REFRIGERET · TIBI
DOMINUS · IPPOLITUS

"May saint Hippolitus give thee solace."—(Cemetery of Hippolitus).

RUTA · OMNIBUS · SUBDITA · ET · ATFABI
LIS · BIBET · IN · NOMINE · PETRI
IN · PACE. ☧

"Ruta who was submissive and sweet with all, will live in the name of Peter, in the peace of Christ."—(Cemetery of Priscilla). (Boldetti, *Osservazioni*, p. 388).

This last inscription is important, because eternal life is there invoked for the departed through the intercession of St. Peter, whose memory was greatly revered and carefully preserved in the catacombs of Priscilla.

A similar phrase engraved upon a glass vase found in the cemetery of St. Lawrence alludes to the local saint :

VIVET · IN · NOMINE · LAURENTI.

"Will live in the name of Lawrence."—(Garrucci : glasses painted in gold, p. 122).

The following inscription is that of a priest and physician named Felix. The last two verses deserve special attention.

HIC · PASTOR · MEDICUS · MONUMENT . . .
FELIX · DUM · SUPEREST · CONDIDIT . . .
PERFECIT · CUMCTA · EXCOLUIT · QUI . .
CERNET · QUO · IACEAT · POENA . . . . .
ADDETUR · ET · TIBI · VALENTINI · GLODRIA · (*sic*) · *sancti*
VIVERE · POST · OBITUM · DAT · *tibi* · DIGNE · *deus.*

"May the glory of the martyr Valentine accrue to thee, and God grant thee to live in honour after thy death." The phrase : "The glory of St. Valentine accrue to thee—"addetur et tibi Valentini gloria sancti"—is noteworthy, as it contains the thought that the merits of the martyr Valentine could aid the departed Felix priest and doctor.

Devotion towards the martyrs was also often displayed by naming their feast-days upon the inscriptions, more frequently so, if the martyrs were interred in that cemetery or near by.

Thus :

" Euschia the faultless, who lived good and pure for 35 years, died on the feast of my lady (St.) Lucy, for whom no praise is too great. She was a perfect Christian, pleasing to her husband and full of grace.—(Catacombs of Syracuse).

The feast here mentioned is that of St. Lucy, the celebrated martyr of Syracuse, which falls on December 13th.

PECORI · DULCIS · ANIMA · BENIT
IN · CIMITERU · VII · IDUS · IUL
D · POSTERA · DIE · MARTURORU

" Pecorius, sweet soul, was carried to the cemetery on the 9th of July, and was buried on the second feast of the martyrs."—(Cemetery of SS. Process and Martinian on the Via Aurelia—Lateran Museum).

This Pecorius had been deposited in the cemetery of Process and Martinian on July 9th, the Octave of their feast, which falls on July 2nd.

This epigraph had been wrongly interpreted, and was thought to refer to the feast of the Children of St. Felicitas, July 10th, but I was able to prove that the above is the true interpretation.

PASCASIUS · VIXIT
PLUS · MINUS · ANNUS · XX
FECIT · FATU · IIII · IDUS
OCTOBRIS · VIII · ANTE

NATALE · DOMNI · AS
TERI · DEVOSITUS · IN
PACE · ☧ Ω.

"Pascasius aged twenty died on October 12th, eight days before the feast of my lord (St.) Asterius."—(Cemetery of Commodilla—Lateran Museum).

From this indication that Pascasius died eight days before the festival of St. Asterius, a martyr from Ostia, it can be argued that it was then customary to commemorate the days preceding the anniversaries of martyrs, as is still done by the Church of Rome.

There are also inscriptions indicating feasts of martyrs mentioned in the martyrology. In the following one, mention is made of the anniversary of the martyrs Felix, Papia, Emerentiana and Alexander, which was celebrated on the 16th September in the cemetery major.

XVI · KAL · OCTOB · MARTURORU*m* · *in* · *cimi*
TERIU · MAIORE · VICTORIS · FELI*cis* · *Papiae* ?
EMERENTIANETIS · ET · ALEXAN*dri*—(Capitoline Museum, New Christian Hall).

This inscription is important, as besides indicating the feast of the martyrs, it gives us also the name of the cemetery where they were buried on the Via Nomentana. It was the Major or Greater Cemetery of St. Agnes and was so called to distinguish it from the Minor or smaller one, that extends under the basilica of this saint.

The formulas that we have mentioned were derived from very ancient calendars, which were the origin of the Martyrology. There had, indeed, existed in Rome ever since the first half of the fourth century

the so-called Feriale, in which the festivals of those martyrs, which the Roman Church celebrated with greater solemnity were registered. And De Rossi has proved that the sources of the so-called Jerominian Martyrology (Martyrologium Hieronimianum) can be traced back to the first half of the third century. There is no doubt that the nativities of martyrs were celebrated in the cemeteries as reported in those documents.

Devotion to the martyrs was also manifested very specially by seeking burial close to their tombs, or in the basilicas of the cemeteries. And the true mind of the Church in approving such a custom is well expressed by the words of Augustine, viz., that the departed were not benefited by this mere propinquity, but by the opportunity it gave to the Christians who visited those sanctuaries to pray in a more special way for their brethren who had passed away. "What helps the soul is not the spot where the dead body rests, but the lively affection of those who pray out of reverence for the place itself."—(Augustine—*De cura pro mortuis*, iv, 5).

So it is that a very large number of inscriptions remind the reader that some particular tomb is near to that of a martyr, and this was expressed by saying that so-and-so had been buried "ad domnum Cajum, ad domnum Cornelium," viz., "near St. Cajus, near St. Cornelius."

SERPENTIU
S·EMIT·LOCU
A·QUINTO·FOSSORE
AD·SANCTUM·CORNELIUM.

" Serpentius bought the tomb from Quintus the Fossor (grave-digger) near the grave of St. Cornelius."—(From the cemetery of Callixtus, now in Avellino).

*jan*UARIUS · ET · S*ilana*
*lo*CUM · BESOM*um*
*emeru*NT · AT · SANCTA · FEL*icitatem*

" Januarius and Silana bought a grave for two bodies near the tomb of St. Felicitas."—(Cemetery of St. Felicitas).

DRACONTIUS PELAGIUS ET JULIA ET ELIA
ANTONINA PARAVERUNT SIBI LOCU ☧
AT IPPOLITU SUPER ARCOSOLIU PROPTER
UNA FILIA.

" Dracontius Pelagius, Julia and Elia Antonina have prepared for themselves and for a daughter a tomb above the arcosolium next to the tomb of St. Hippolytus." —(Recently I have proved that this Hippolytus was the leader of the Greek martyrs buried in the cemetery of Callixtus under the monastery of the Trappist Fathers—Lateran Museum).

IN · CRIPTA · NOBA · RETRO
SANCTOS

" In the new crypt behind the saints."—(From the cemetery of Ciriaca—Boldetti, *Osservazioni*, p. 53). It refers to a grave placed in a new gallery excavated behind the tombs of the martyrs.

FELICISSIMUS · ET · LEOPAR*da · emerunt*
BISOMUM · AT · CRISCENT*ionem · martyrem*
INTROITU

'Felicissimus and Leoparda bought a grave for two persons at the entrance near the Martyr Crescentio." —(Cemetery of Priscilla).

The grave they bought was situated near the entrance of the gallery that led to the cubiculum of St. Crescentio.

The places near the tombs of martyrs, called "limina sanctorum," were much valued and coveted. It is stated in the following inscription that a devout woman obtained through her virtues a tomb "at the threshold of the saints (intra limina sanctorum), where many desired but few obtained burial."

*amatrix · pau*PERORUM
quae · pro · tanta · MERITA · ACCEPIT
*sepulchrum · intra · l*IMINA · SANCTORUM
. . . . T · ACCEPIT
*quod · multi · cupiu*N · ET · RARI · ACCIPIUN
Antonio · et · S · VACRIO · CS
(ANNO 381).

"She was a lover of the poor and for her many virtues she merited a tomb near the saints, a thing that many covet but few obtain."—(Originally in the Borgian Museum at Velletri).

I will end by quoting the verses engraved by St. Ambrose upon the tomb of his brother Satyrus, whom he caused to be interred near the martyr St. Victor in the basilica of Faustus, in the cemetery of Philip's Orchards in Milan.

Uranio Satyro supremum frater honorem
Martyris ad laevam detulit Ambrosius
Haec meriti merces ut sacri sanguinis humor
Finitimas penetrans abluet exuvias.

" Ambrose wished to pay a last tribute to his brother Satyr by placing his grave on the left of the martyr. And the reward of his virtues will be that the holy blood of the martyr of the faith, flowing into the neighbouring tomb, will bathe and sanctify his body."

It is therefore certain that the early Christains had a real cult for the martyrs and this the monuments prove beyond question.

During the fourth and fifth centuries everyone desired to be interred near the martyrs and often they did not hesitate to destroy existing tombs in order to obtain a grave for themselves, and to damage even the monuments consecrated to the martyrs. There were many influential persons who did their utmost to repress such a scandal, as for instance, the deacon Sabinus. In his inscription in the basilica of St. Lawrence in Rome he says that it would be better to imitate the saints and approach them in spirit, than materially in the body, —" corpore non opus est, anima tendamus ad illos."

So too, Pope Damasus wished to avoid causing any damage in the cemetery of Callixtus by seeking a burial place for himself next to the martyrs, but had his tomb prepared a little further off ; and wrote : " Hic fateor Damasus volui mea condere membra sed cineres timui sanctos vexare piorum."—" Here I Damasus, wished to have laid my limbs, but feared to disturb the sacred ashes of the saints."

It is therefore clear that proofs of the Cult of the Saints in ancient times are by no means wanting ; they are indeed superabundant.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CULT OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

THIS cult so dear to the heart of Christians, and not unknown even to the Moslem womenfolk, is specially mentioned by Ignatius, Irenæus, Epiphanius, Augustine and in all the ancient Liturgies both of the Eastern and the Western Churches. It was certainly practised by the early Christians, though not in the same way as at present; ecclesiastical discipline having varied of necessity since the first centuries. It could not be very clearly defined or solemn during the era of persecutions, because the Christians, who lived in the midst of pagan superstitions, had good cause to fear that the cult of Mary might be misunderstood and turned into a worship that is due to God alone. They were therefore compelled to be very cautious in the use of images. Even Our Lord Himself was mostly represented either under a symbolical form, or merely as a historical Personage in scenes drawn from the gospels. Only in later times, when peace had been granted to the Church, do we begin to find the figure of the Redeemer isolated as a true image of Worship. No wonder then that we have no record of portraits of Mary used during the earliest centuries as objects of external cult in the same way as at present. The so-called Madonnas of St. Luke

form no exception, as they cannot in any way be attributed to St. Luke, but are of the Byzantine School.

Notwithstanding, there do exist in the Roman catacombs some paintings representing the Virgin Mary which date from the centuries of persecution, and so prove that the early Christians nurtured towards her the same feelings of veneration that we do. The Mother of Jesus was then portrayed in two different ways, either seated and holding her Divine Infant in her arms, or standing with her arms apart as one who intercedes. As instances of the latter case, I may mention some gilded glasses of the third and fourth centuries discovered in the catacombs, where the name MARIA is written near the Orans, or praying figure, so as to dispel all doubts of interpretation.

The group of Mary with the Divine Babe in her arms or upon her knee, is usually completed by the presence of the Wise Men, who approach presenting their gifts, and this scene was particularly dear to the Western Christians, because it reminded them of their calling out of darkness of the Gentiles into the light of Truth. The Gospel does not mention the number of the Wise Men, and ancient Christian art portrays them now as two, now as three, four or more, but three is the usual number. In other paintings Mary appears alone seated and holding the Child Jesus. In these last representations she cannot be regarded as a merely historical personage, as some people erroneously argue to be the case in connection with the coming of the Wise Men. Among such paintings, the most ancient of all is undoubtedly that in the cemetery of Priscilla on the Via Salaria. (Fig. 9).

It is quite clear to those who are familiar with ancient Christian art that this painting of the catacombs of Priscilla represents Mary, but the artist purposely added a distinctive and characteristic mark that dispels any possible doubt on the subject. This mark is the star painted in the upper part, which is now only dimly visible owing to the fading of the colours. And as the star is always to be seen in the group of the Wise Men or near the crib, on ancient sarcophagi, so it may be taken for granted that the Woman with the Child in her arms is indeed Mary. On one side stands a man who holds a volume in his left hand and with the right points to the star. This figure represents a prophet of the Old Testament, foretelling the coming of the mystic Star, Christ, appointed to enlighten the darkness of the Gentiles, and is probably Isaias, who foretold the light which would appear at the birth of the Redeemer. And indeed prophets are sometimes represented by a similar youthful figure in other ancient Christian monuments.

To fix the date of this precious fresco let us compare it with some other sepulchral paintings of which we know the approximate age. The date of many of them can be fixed by comparing them with certain pagan monuments still extant and by the chronology of the galleries and crypts in which they were discovered. Whoever is familiar with the paintings of the catacombs can thus decide with sufficient accuracy whether the fresco belongs to the first three centuries, or to the era of peace, or to a later age.

Now the figure of Mary in the cemetery of Priscilla is painted in a far more graceful and beautiful style

than all the other paintings which we have good reason to suppose cannot belong to any time later than the third century. It has that classical refinement that we admire in the frescoes of the so-called house of Livia on the Palatine, or in the houses of Pompei. This alone would suffice to fix its date at the early part of the second, or at the end of the first century. But there is another reason that confirms us in this opinion and it is based upon more recent excavations made in that subterranean gallery. The figure of Mary forms part of the decoration of a recess or *loculus* in the upper portion of the crypt, and is therefore contemporary with the recess or *loculus* itself. By lowering the floor of the crypt, another group of those loculi or cavities was found at a greater depth, which beyond question must have been excavated subsequently. And as these loculi or tombs are closed by some very ancient inscriptions painted in red, not later than the second century, it is clear that the figure of Mary belongs either to the beginning of that century or to the end of the preceding one. Therefore this image is the most ancient figure of the Mother of God known to us and it is now honoured throughout the whole world. And it has a special importance as it stands in a very early part of the apostolic cemetery of Priscilla, and we may suppose that it was painted by order of somebody who had seen the Apostles and had received from them precious information concerning the Mother of Our Saviour.

This image is the first of a long series that can be seen in the catacombs ; and who knows how many more lie there buried and hidden !

Let us just mention those which are best known and which date from the second and third century, none being later than the fourth. Three belong to the same cemetery of Priscilla. One image of Mary holding the Child can be seen upon the tomb of a Christian virgin, as the type and model of virginity (Fig. 10); another in a scene of the adoration of the Wise Men, and the third is in the less frequently depicted group of the Annunciation.

In another cemetery, that of Domitilla on the Via Ardeatina, the divine Mother is portrayed as seated on a throne with the Child on her knee, while four persons in Eastern dress, representing the Wise Men, stand around her. (Fig. 11).

In this painting the decoration of the background deserves special notice, the festoons hanging from the wall denoting a house. This leads one to think that the painter had in his mind the words of the Gospel of St. Matthew, which seem to imply that the Wise Men adored the Lord inside a house and not in the manger of Bethlehem : " et intrantes domum invenerunt puerum cum Maria matre eius et procidentes adoraverunt eum." (Matthew ii. 11).

Three Wise Men are represented in another painting of the same cemetery.

The same scene with only three Wise Men is painted in the cemetery of Callixtus on the Via Appia ; while only two are to be seen in a cubiculum of the cemetery of SS. Peter and Marcellinus on the Via Labicana. Finally in the cemetery of the Via Nomentana, which was once called the Ostrianum, but to which we have restored the proper name of Greater Cemetery (Coe-

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meterium majus) of St. Agnes, we find the figures of Mary and the Child marked by the monogram of the Name of Christ repeated on both sides of the drawing and both the monograms turned towards the Child. (Fig. 12).

Our Lady was also represented in ancient Christian sculptures of which the oldest is a fragment found in the basilica of Damus-el-Kerita near Carthage and is not later than the fourth century.

Besides these pictures and many sculptured sarcophagi, we possess a great number of small objects made in glass or ivory and other materials, upon which the Divine Mother is usually portrayed in the act of prayer. The great number of these engraved objects and the places where they were found, namely, on the tombs themselves, proves that the Virgin was not intended to represent a mere historical personage. If it were so, we should see her only in large historical compositions or in the central part of vaults over the cubicula, amidst other episodes taken from the Gospels. But when we see Mary painted in so many different places, even alone—an isolated figure—and her image placed upon the tombs as a sign of protection and defence, we cannot doubt that those images were placed there not as simple ornamental objects, but from a real feeling of reverence towards her, and that she is represented as a mediator before her Divine Son.

Here a remark is necessary. It is certain that after the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.), when the Divine Maternity of Mary was proclaimed, it became a general custom in Christendom to represent her in the scene of the coming of the Wise Men. This clearly proves

that such a scene was universally regarded as expressing the belief that Mary was truly the Mother of God. No doubt therefore it had a similar meaning during the first centuries, and the figure there of Mary bore a special importance and was not a mere accessory.

Let us add that the Eastern Church confirms this point of Catholic dogma. The Greek liturgy contains extremely beautiful prayers of very remote times, which prove the antiquity of the cult of Mary. She is called in those prayers "absolutely holy and stainless."

Here is an example of the prayers in the Greek ritual regarding the Blessed Virgin (in the preparation of the Offering): "In honour and in memory of the blessed above all creatures, our glorious Lady Mother of God and ever-virgin Mary, through whose intercession be pleased O Lord to accept this sacrifice upon Thy High Altar."

At the beginning of the liturgy: "Forgive us O Lord . . . through the intercession of the holy Mother of God and that of all the Saints." After the Consecration: "It is verily right to call thee blessed, O God-bearer, who art ever hallowed and wholly immaculate and Mother of our God, thou who art more admirable than Cherubim and exceedingly more glorious than Seraphim, thou who without a shadow of corruption gavest birth to the Word of God, to thee do we give glory as to the true Mother of God."

Here then the testimony of solemn prayers is added to that of monuments. Belonging to different rites and liturgies they prove the antiquity of the cult rendered by the Church to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

CHAPTER V.

THE APOSTOLIC FOUNDATION AND THE SUPREMACY OF THE ROMAN SEE.

APOSTOLIC MINISTRY OF PETER IN ROME.

The earliest records of the Christian Community in Rome centre round the narrative in the Acts of the Apostles regarding Aquila and Priscilla, who were compelled to leave Rome in consequence of the edict of Claudius against the Jews, and who, journeying to Corinth, came there into contact with Paul. After this edict, which can be dated 49 of the Christian era, we have no news of the Christian Community in Rome until the year 58 when Paul addressed his letter to the Romans and more particularly to the converted Gentiles. It appears from this Epistle that the Church of Rome had already attained to a great importance inasmuch as the Apostle could praise the faith of her followers as celebrated throughout the whole world. (Ad Romanos I, 8).

Paul himself came to Rome for his trial before Nero in 61 A.D., and during the two years it lasted he wrote his letter to the Philippians, sending to these Macedonian Christians the greetings of the Christians of Rome and particularly of those of the house of Cæsar. In the

following year, viz., in 64 A.D., that terrible fire broke out which afforded a pretext for the persecution of the Christians, and many scholars are of opinion that Peter was in Rome at that time.

The coming of Peter to the capital of the Empire and his laying the foundations of that Church are historically certain, but neither the date of his arrival nor the length of his stay can be accurately fixed. According to a tradition handed down to us by Eusebius (A.D. c. 320), Peter held the episcopal See of Rome for 25 years, from the third year of Caligula to the twelfth of Nero. But the same Eusebius gives as a reason for the coming of the Apostle to Rome in the reign of Claudius his controversy with Simon the Sorcerer, and St. Jerome in his chronicles fixes the date of Peter's arrival in the year 42, which is also the date given by the author of *De mortibus persecutorum*—Death of persecutors. Lastly the Filocalian Catalogue fixes the limit of his episcopacy to the years between 29 and 55, a date which is certainly erroneous, or based upon a special calculation.

Tertullian and Origen are the earliest writers who give one and the same date for the deaths of both the Apostles in Rome. Whatever be the facts, it is certain that their common anniversary has been celebrated in Rome on the 29th of June since the beginning of the fourth century, as attested by the Liberian Calendar. Amidst all these chronological uncertainties the great fundamental fact remains that St. Peter came to Rome and died there. Clement of Rome alludes to it in the very first century, Ignatius of Antioch at the beginning of the second, and the whole Christian world was

he had himself instructed. Moreover the name of his disciple Mark, mentioned in that Epistle, connects the writing of the latter with the time when the second Gospel was composed in accordance with the teachings of the Apostle. Now all this points to a permanent ministry, not to a fleeting apparition during the horrors of the massacre ordered by Nero.

It is also the unanimous opinion of scholars that the letter addressed by Pope Clement (A.D. 96-98) to the Corinthians contains a valuable allusion to Peter's stay in Rome. In it the two Apostles Peter and Paul are mentioned together, and it is said that others joined them and gave testimony to their faith "in the midst of us"—ἐν ἡμῖν. And another expression in that celebrated letter referring to "these men who gave holy rules to Christian life," probably contains an allusion to the government of the Roman Church by the Apostles, (τούτοις τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ὁσίως πολιτευσαμένοις or in Latin "viris istis sancte vitam instituentibus)."[1]

The martyr Ignatius writing to the Romans at the beginning of the second century says that he could not rule them as Peter and Paul would have done. Therefore he assumed that both the Apostles ruled over the Romans and exercised a real and true government in the Church of Rome. So too, Dionysius of Corinth, writing to Pope Soter speaks of the seed that had grown up in Rome from the sowing of Peter and Paul (A.D. c. 150).[2]

[1] Ep. I, Clem. ad Cor. vi, 1, cf. Duchesne *Les nouveaux textes de S. Clément de Rome* (Revue du monde catholique, 1877).

[2] Eusebius, H.E. II, 25.

One may object that these are mere references ; but they could not be explained except by maintaining that these writers were fully aware that both the Apostles had for some time held authority in Rome. Yet the real government of the Roman Church must have been held by him who had been its first founder, certainly not Paul, as he himself declares in his letter to the Romans.

A similar interpretation should be given to the words of the priest Caius, who lived in the same century and who, pointing to the memorials of the Apostles in Rome, says that they had founded that Church. These words have a broad sense and should be interpreted in accordance with the other testimonials regarding the real founder of the Church in Rome. At any rate they are an echo of the tradition of Peter's real and effective ministry there.

To this effective ministry Iraenaeus (A.D. 140-202) alludes when he asserts that Peter founded the Roman Church, and in harmony with Papias and Clement of Alexandria (A.D. c.150-211/5), says that he preached the Gospel in Rome, which was put later into writing by Mark.[1]

The same thing is confirmed by Tertullian (A.D. c. 160-202)[2] who mentions expressly the administration of Baptism in Rome by the Apostle, writing that " there was no difference between those whom John had baptised in the Jordan and those whom Peter had baptised in the

[1] Adversus haereses. III 1.

[2] De Baptismo I.

Tiber "—"Nihil interest inter eos quos Joannes in Jordano et Petrus in Tiberi tinxit." He thus compares the ministry of John by the Jordan with that of Peter on the banks of the Tiber; and these words evidently allude to a regular apostolate, not to any baptism that might have been administered by mere chance. This thought is confirmed by the same apologist (De Praescriptione hereticorum) when he says that in Rome the two Apostles gave not only their blood, but their whole teaching, "Totam doctrinam cum sanguine suo profuderunt." Therefore it is clear that if Peter spread throughout Rome his whole teaching, he was there not only for a short period, as some people contend, but during the exercise of a true apostolate.

It can be gathered from the Epistle to the Romans—Ad Romanos—that Peter arrived in Rome before Paul. That Epistle is written in 58 A.D. or three years before Paul's arrival, which date is now given as the autumn of 61. Paul addresses the Christian community in Rome as an already established Church—"Omnibus qui sunt Romæ dilectis Dei, vocatis sanctis"—"To all that are in Rome, the beloved of God, called to be saints"—and it is not likely that he would have written such an important Letter to an insignificant group of converts, almost lost in the immense metropolis. He addresses them indeed as a Church already celebrated throughout the world: "I give thanks to my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is spoken of in the whole world"—"Gratias ago pro omnibus vobis quia fides vestra annuntiatur in universo mundo," and this community of the faithful in Rome is already so well organised that it has what may be termed house-

hold churches—" Salute Prisca and Aquila and the Church which is in their house "—" Salutate Priscam et Aquilam et domesticam Ecclesiam eorum." In the same letter Paul says distinctly that for many years he had longed to visit Rome—" cupiditatem habemus veniendi ad vos ex multis iam precedentibus annis (xv. 23) " therefore we can conclude that the fame of the Roman Church had spread abroad long before the year 58 A.D. But he adds that he had been hindered from coming only for fear of building " upon another man's foundations "—" ne super alienum fundamentum aedificarem (xv. 20—22) "

It is probable that news of the Christian Faith had been carried first to Rome by some " strangers of Rome " —" *advenae Romani*," who had heard Peter's first sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 10), or perhaps by some soldier of the Italian Cohort stationed at Cesarea, whose centurion Cornelius had been converted by Peter. But these could only have been the mere beginning which Paul would never have called foundations upon which he was unwilling to build through respect. And this feeling of his was so deep as to urge him to explain to the Romans that he would see them only in passing on his way to Spain. Therefore, considerably prior to 58 A.D. there must have been another veritable and authoritative founder of the Church of Rome, before whom, out of respect, Paul effaced himself. Could he have been an obscure and unknown man, as some writers maintain ? But the splendour of the Roman Church proved his ministry to have been so important that his name should have been preserved in the local traditions of that Church. At any rate it is out of the question

that Paul, conscious as he was of his great mission, should have yielded to the authority of a man inferior to himself. On the other hand all is clearly explained if the founder of the Roman Church was Peter as the constant tradition of the centuries asserts.

According to a tradition related by Eusebius and by Jerome, Peter came first to Rome in the reign of Claudius about the year 42 A.D. And although documents are wanting confirming this date to a certainty, the epoch of Claudius agrees with other indications. Under him, indeed, grave disturbances having broken out among the Jews by reason of the Christian Faith, the latter were banished by the Emperor, "always in a turmoil owing to Christ"—"*assidue tumultuantibus impulsore Chresto*," as Suetonius writes, and as the Acts of the Apostles confirm. Now these tumults in the synagogue of Rome clearly prove that some very capable and authoritative preacher of the new faith had addressed himself mainly to the Jews; and no one better than Peter, whose special mission was to the Jews, could have been this authoritative person.

Moreover, the Acts of the Apostles tell us that Peter having been sent to prison by Herod Agrippa, was delivered in the year 42, and that subsequently in the year 50 he presided at an Apostolic Council in the same city, Jerusalem, but we know nothing of his whereabouts during the interval. The edict of Claudius against the Jews was promulgated in the year 49, so that if he were in Rome he would have been compelled to leave with the other converted Jews in that same year, and this agrees perfectly with his presence in Jerusalem in the year 50.

We may therefore safely infer that the traditions relating to Peter's coming to Rome previously to Paul and his laying the foundations of that Church rests upon solid and creditable ground and agrees perfectly with the history of primitive Christianity.

It is now universally acknowledged that Peter suffered in Rome under Nero, and no further demonstration is needed to prove it. One must therefore admit that he came twice to Rome, but the dates of his second journey and of his death are uncertain. This second journey could not have taken place before 63 A.D. because Paul came to Rome in 61 and remained there the two years of his trial, and during this interval the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's letter to the Philippians are silent as to the presence of Peter in that city. He may have gone there either at the end of 63 or during 64 after the persecution had broken out, wishing to revisit in her hour of danger the Church he had already founded. At any rate the date of his death is uncertain and may be placed at any time between 64 and 68, the last year of Nero. The date 67, which many follow, can be justified by the completion of the 25 years computed by Eusebius and by a passage of Jerome asserting that Seneca died two years before the Apostles. But it is impossible at present to solve the question. Whatever be the date of that glorious martyrdom, we may be sure that it happened in Rome, and Peter was most probably crucified with the first Roman martyrs, some of whom were crucified—"crucibus affixi." The cross of Peter was erected in the Vatican Circus, on the very place where the first martyrs were massacred, and near that Obelisk which was transferred later to the

front of St. Peter's as a trophy of the Victory of Christ.[1]

Besides his tomb in the Vatican, the authenticity of which is beyond doubt, there are other memorials in Rome connected with the story of St. Peter, but they are not equally conclusive. In a former study bearing upon this point[2] I endeavoured to sift those records, distinguishing those that best deserve credit because they are confirmed by ancient documents, from those which popular fancy has created or embellished, but this is not the place to repeat my analysis. Enough to say that traditions, which seem altogether absurd and extravagant, often contain the germ of a truth. Traditions connected with the monuments are always to be taken into especial consideration and should not easily be brushed aside, because archæological discoveries very often confirm their remote antiquity.

Now all such traditions point to Peter's prolonged abode in Rome and not to a fleeting visit, and could not be explained otherwise. If indeed he had died shortly after his arrival in Rome they would all have been focussed upon the story of his martyrdom, but no legends would have sprung up containing detailed accounts of

[1] A connection between the martyrdom of St. Peter and that of the *multitudo ingens* mentioned by Tacitus may be traced in a group of martyrs assigned by the Jerominian Martyrology to the 29th of June, on the Vatican hill. "In eadem urbe—Aurelia — scorum Nevationi et aliorum noningentorum septuaginta et septem martyrum" (ed. De Rossi—Duchesne, p. 84). On the place of St. Peter's martyrdom, I have written at length in the *Nuovo Bolletino di archeologia christiana*, 1905, Nos. 1–4, showing that the Janiculum tradition is of very late date.

[2] See O. Marucchi, *Le memorie degli Apostoli Pietro e Paolo in Roma*—2nd edit. Roma Pustet, 1903.

persons and circumstances relating to his lengthened stay in Rome, even though altered by the lapse of time.

It is noteworthy that the most important and well-founded traditions, excepting that of his burial in the Vatican, are those relating to places where Peter was long accustomed to assemble his Roman converts in peace and safety. Such are the very ancient churches of St. Pudentiana and St. Prisca, the traditions of which, though little appreciated by certain modern critics, were seriously studied and accepted by the great De Rossi, and this is enough to satisfy us. Two other localities can be added: the Eudoxian Title in which Grisar traced the existence of a very ancient apostolic dwelling and the cemetery frequented by the Apostle, of which I shall speak later.

We may admit that these traditions are obscured by legends, and also that some of them, not based upon ancient documents have their origin in the popular imagination. We must however acknowledge that they form a very imposing whole, and prove that the fact of Peter's residence in Rome, and especially his preaching and his ministry made such a deep impression there that it still echoes throughout the centuries. And this seems to me a very profound argument in favour of the belief that Peter performed real and valuable apostolic work in Rome.

CHAPTER VI.

TRADITIONS RELATING TO SOME CHRISTIANS OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE

Roman writers in some passages mention the followers of the new Religion as people given up to a nefarious superstition, as we have it in the words of Suetonius, or as leading a lugubrious and melancholy life according to Tacitus in the passage where he speaks of Pomponia Grecina.[1] The Christians were then also accused of provoking revolutions and of introducing new ideas—"molitores rerum novarum"—an accusation falsely repeated in subsequent times.

The persecution under Nero was at first confined to Rome, but in time it spread to the provinces, although some scholars deny the fact. After Nero's death in 68 A.D., the persecution came to an end, but the Christians still remained under the same legal ban, viz., they were considered followers of a forbidden cult, and on that account exposed to violence and to the rigour of the law against foreign religions.

This is certainly what Tertullian refers to when he says that, all the acts of Nero having been repealed, only his *Institutum Neronianum* by which Christians were liable to persecution, remained in force.[2]

[1] Tacitus, Ann xiii, 32. About Pomponia Grecina and her Christianity, G.B. De Rossi wrote learnedly in Vol. I of his *Roma sotterranea*, pp. 306–315.

[2] Tertull—*Ad nationes* I, 7—On the *Institutum Neronianum*, see also the learned work of Attilio Profumo, *Le fonti ed i tempi dell'incendio Neroniano* (Rome, 1905).

But the political vicissitudes that followed the death of the first persecutor, the accession to power of the Flavii, and the personal character of Vespasian and Titus, greatly improved the position of the Christians who, notwithstanding their legal disadvantages, were enabled to enjoy an era of profound peace which lasted more than twenty years until new disturbances broke out under the tyrant Domitian.

It is quite natural that during this period Christianity should have spread widely throughout the whole Empire, and especially in the city of Rome, where many foreign cults found worshippers and the official religion was already despised. A worn-out prejudice would have us believe that the early Christians had sprung exclusively from the lowest social strata. But now-a-days it is proved that although they found an " ingens multitudo " —" a great multitude," in the words of Tacitus, amongst whom were certainly poor slaves and outcasts to whom the new religion spoke of an immortal hope, yet in the midst of that crowd were illustrious Roman patricians who did not disdain to bow their proud heads before the humble sign of the Cross.

Among these we must mention the Acilii Glabriones who were of such high standing that Pertinax on becoming Emperor proclaimed them to be the most noble among the patricians.[1] Manius Acilius Glabrio, who in the year 91 A.D. held the consulship jointly with the future Emperor Trajan, was murdered by order of Domitian in 95, the year in which Flavius Clemens and Flavia Domitilla were sentenced to death on account

[1] Herodian, *Hist*, II, 3.

of the same vague accusation of atheism, and of following foreign customs and new notions (molitores rerum novarum), an accusation which is now proved to have been identical with that of following the Christian Faith.[1]

The Christianity of Acilius Glabrio was therefore the very reasonable surmise of some historians; but now that his family tomb has been found in the central part of the cemetery of Priscilla, with obvious tokens of Christianity, that simple conjecture has developed into an undoubted historical fact.[2] Members of the Acilii Glabriones family bore the surnames of Priscus, Prisca and Priscilla, whence came the name of this very ancient cemetery on the Via Salaria. There also were buried the married couple Aquila and Prisca, of whom mention is made in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles of St. Paul; and it is worth noting that Acilius Glabrio, according to the testimony of Ausonius, bore also the surname of Aquilinus. Therefore it is probable that Aquila and Prisca took their names from the Acilii and that the latter were related to Pudens, Pudentiana and Praxedes, founders and owners of the cemetery of Priscilla. One can therefore reasonably assert that the Christian community of Rome during the first century was not composed only of low-born people but had amongst its followers noble and high-born families.

The conversion of these people can reasonably be connected with Peter's ministry in Rome, either as the direct result of his own preaching, or of that of some of his disciples, and we shall not be blamed as over-credulous

[1] Suetonius, *Domitian* 10. Dion Cassius lxvii, 13.

[2] See De Rossi, *Bulletino* 1889, n. 1–2. Cf. my *Catacombe romane* 1905, pp. 459 seqq.

if we think that the legends of later times connecting these noble families and their dependents with the Apostle himself are an echo of ancient traditions.

After Nero's death the Roman Church enjoyed uninterrupted peace under the short reigns of Galba, Otto, Vitellius and the two first Flavian Emperors, and it is precisely during this period that the Christian cemeteries, which were originally small private sepulchres, grew in number and importance. At that time the two most ancient and important of those Roman cemeteries first came into use, namely those of Priscilla and Domitilla. They have many points of similarity, both having been founded by patrician converts, the former by the Acilii, the latter by the Flavii. Of the two, the cemetery of Priscilla is the first in rank, both for the great importance of its memories and for the preservation of its monuments. I will just mention here that in the course of my researches I discovered that a memorial of Peter's first preaching in Rome must be located somewhere near this cemetery, viz., the Sedes ubi prius sedit S. Petrus—the first chair of Peter. I remarked in an essay written on the subject that an indication of the primitive residence of Peter in Rome is registered in the Papyrus of Monza together with that of the group of martyrs buried in the cemetery of Priscilla and in the neighbouring one of the Giordani on the Via Salaria; and therefore this record must also refer to that very spot. This early tradition was centered in the later days of peace in a region adjoining the cemetery called "Coemeterium ad nymphas Sti. Petri"—"Cemetery of the Springs of St. Peter"—or Coemeterium Ostianum.

This opinion differs from that of De Rossi, who associated that tradition with the Via Nomentana and the cemetery with the name of St. Agnes. But I am certain that my master, who expressed this opinion in 1864 would now alter his verdict. And indeed a group of galleries which dates back to apostolic times can be seen in the cemetery of Priscilla, and not in the Via Nomentana, as well as a family tomb constructed beneath the property of certain patricians who were in touch with Peter. Here—and not in the Via Nomentana—a noble basilica was erected containing the tombs of seven popes; and there were many reservoirs and two baptistries, and a marshy region through which springs filtered, everything naturally recalling the "Coemeterium ad nymphas Sti Petri"—"the cemetery of the springs of St. Peter." And finally in the cemetery of Priscilla and not in the Via Nomentana we have found many ancient sepultural inscriptions with the name *Petrus* adapted by Christians in memory of the apostle.

I should wander too far from the limits of this study were I to develop this thesis regarding the position of the cemetery connected with the Apostle's earliest ministry in Rome; and if anyone wishes to study the question he may read what I have written on the subject on various occasions in the *Nuovo Bollettino di Archeologia Cristiana*.

The two cemeteries of Domitilla and of Priscilla are similar in many respects; they are the oldest of the great Christian cemeteries of Rome, both were excavated in an age which can be called apostolic, and in both of them persons were buried who had seen the Apostles or were converted and baptised by them. They were

both the property of aristocratic families, the Acilii and the Flavii, the most distinguished of Christian patricians and disciples of the Apostles.

Both have a certain stateliness, which clearly shows the wealth and the high social position of their owners, and the security they felt about their possessions. The cemetery on the Via Salaria was founded under the large suburban Villa of the Acilii Glabriones, and vast caves of that property were converted into family tombs near which galleries branching in all directions were excavated. There we can see a very ancient underground church of large proportions decorated with graceful pictures, worthy of any splendid patrician monument, with the entrance only a few yards from the high road.

We find much the same conditions in the cemetery of Domitilla on the Via Ardeatina. Here also the starting-point of the galleries is imposing ; on one side a magnificent vestibule adorned with fine frescoes opens directly on the high road and on the other a monumental staircase leads to fine rooms and spacious galleries, and in this cemetery we can see some inscriptions belonging to some disciples of S. Paul, such as Ampliatus and Narestus.[1]

The study of these two great cemeteries shows that they belong to the same date, proves the high position and antiquity of their founders, and confirms the tradition that they were contemporary with the Apostles.

[1] See my description of the cemetery of Domitilla in the second article of *Nuova Roma sotterranea.*

CHAPTER VII.

THE SUPREMACY OF THE ROMAN SEE IN ANCIENT DOCUMENTS AND IN THE MONUMENTS OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY.

Having just proved that Peter exercised in Rome a real apostolate, let us also prove that on this very basis the early Christian Church recognised the supremacy of the Roman See, and show what monuments bear witness to the fact.

The solemn words addressed by Christ to Peter when He constituted him head of His Church sufficiently prove that the Bishop of Rome succeeding St. Peter must be recognised as the primate of all the bishops. The whole of Christian tradition confirms this truth, and the earliest document relating to it is the famous letter addressed by Clement of Rome to the Corinthians, which by the common consent of scholars was written between 93 and 97 A.D., only thirty years after the martyrdom of the two Apostles and before the echo of their voices had died away. There he mentions that both the Apostles died in Rome, and in his endeavour to establish concord among the members of that glorious Church of Corinth founded by Paul, he addresses them not only with apostolic charity but also with evident authority, although Corinth was in Greece and had its own Bishop. "It is right," he writes in Chapter LXVIII, "that you should bow your heads in obedience and put an end to your foolish quarrels. You will give us great joy if you heed what

we write to you in the Holy Ghost and re-establish harmony among yourselves. We are also sending to you faithful and holy men that they may be witnesses between you and us, and we do it that you may see clearly that our aim is the restoration of peace amongst you."

Although this testimony alone should suffice, others can be added, extending throughout the centuries, which show that the tradition relating to the supremacy of Peter's Chair was never interrupted. Ignatius of Antioch called the Church of Rome "That blessed and enlightened Church, which presides over the others." So also, when the priest Cajus at the beginning of the third century summoned heretics before the tribunal of the Roman See, he pointed out to them the tombs of Peter and Paul as the material proof of the Apostolic Succession in the Roman Church. "I can show," he says to the heretic, "the trophies of the Apostles, for if you go to the Vatican or to the Ostian Way you shall behold there the tombs of those who founded this Church." Other writers in later times have said the same thing.

For a similar reason Irenæus writes that every Church should remain in union with the Church of Rome, "Propter potentiorem principalitatem" (Adv. haereses, III, 3)—"because of its greater pre-eminence," and declared her to be "The greatest and most ancient Church founded by the Apostles, by whose authority we confound all heretics." And Cyprian (De Unitate Ecclesiae) expressed the same thought. "Whoever has set aside Peter's Chair, upon which the Church is founded, how

can he expect to be still in the Church ? "—" Qui cathedram Petri super quam fundata est Ecclesia deserit, in Ecclcsia se esse confidit ? " And he calls the Church of Rome " The principal Church and root of unity, into which error cannot enter."

The voice of the Church in her triumph, speaking through her Councils and by her great writers, agrees harmoniously with these affirmations of the suffering Church in the days of persecution. And we find the Eastern Church recognising at the council of Sardica (343 A.D.), the supremacy of Rome and solemnly declaring " Petri Apostoli sedem honoramus "—" We honour the Chair of Peter." Likewise Jerome, writing to Pope Damasus, declares that he is ready to separate himself from the Eastern Patriarchs if they do not remain united to the Roman Shepherd, " Non novi Vitalem, Meletium respuo, ignoro Paulinum, quicumque tecum non colligit spargit " (Ep. X ad Damasum)— " I do not know Vitalis, I reject Meletius, I do not know Paulinus, whoever does not gather with thee, scatters," and he further explains the theological reasons for his belief, " Because I know that upon that Rock the Church is built "—" quia super illam petram aedificatam Ecclesiam scio."

And at the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) where the Bishops were still representatives of the first period of peace, it was formulated publicly and without contradiction that " All ages have known that blessed Peter lives and holds authority in his successors "—" omnibus saeculis notum quod beatissimus Petrus in suis successoribus vivit et iudicium exercet " (*Acta Council, Vol. III*, p. 1154).

And now laying aside written testimonials let us pass to the examination of monuments.

If the earliest document testifying to the supremacy of Rome is a letter sent from Rome to the East, the most ancient monument bearing the same testimony carries an inscription sent by the East to Rome, I mean the famous inscription of Abercius, bishop of Hierapolis during the second century, which I have already illustrated with reference to the Holy Eucharist.

Here is Abercius, a contemporary of Marcus Aurelius, who attests in his epigraph that he is the disciple of the immaculate Shepherd and was sent by Him to Rome, " In order to behold a Kingdom and a Queen dressed in gold and with golden shoes." He goes on to say " And I there beheld a people distinguished by a splendid sign." These words have a symbolical meaning, and according to De Rossi and other commentators this Queen is meant to represent the Church of Rome, and the people so distinguished are the Christians of that city bearing the " signum Fidei "—the sign of Faith—of that faith which, according to St. Paul, is spoken of in the whole world—" annuntiatur in universo mundo."

That phrase is very important and shows what veneration an Eastern Bishop professed towards the Roman Church in the second century.

When, shortly after the time of Abercius, Christian art rapidly began to develop, portraits of the two chief Apostles, shewn together, appear on the monuments in the Roman catacombs, proving the apostolate they had together exercised in Rome.

Whenever they are in company with the other Apostles, these two always occupy the place of honour, they are seated while the others are standing, and have a *nimbus* (halo) around their heads as a sign of authority.

But if in Christian paintings and sculptures later than the third century, Peter and Paul have the place of honour, it is on the figure of Peter that the oldest art bestows marks of supremacy. Christ is more than once represented in the act of imparting His law, and it is always to Peter that He consigns the sacred Book, this bestowal being often explained by the wording, " Dominus legem dat "—" the Lord gives the law."

This oft-repeated scene meant that Peter was the Keeper and the authorised interpreter of Divine Revelation.

As most evident examples of this group the following may be mentioned : a tomb from the Vatican (now in the Lateran Museum), which shows Peter receiving the law from Christ already ascended into heaven, thus clearly expressing the fact that Peter remained His visible representative on earth (Fig. 13) ; a painting in the cemetery of Priscilla discovered a few years ago ; the only painting of its kind ; the gilded glass from Porto now in the Vatican, in which the words " Lex Domini " —" the law of the Lord," are inscribed upon the scroll which is being given to him ; the mosaic of the fourth century in St. Constanza where a parallel is drawn between the Ancient Law promulgated by Moses on Mount Sinai, and the New one given to Peter by the Saviour.

Peter was also represented by the figure of a shepherd and a graceful composition now in the Lateran

Museum portrays very clearly this idea. Christ in the garb of a shepherd stands there in the midst of His twelve Apostles, each of whom has a lamb in front of him as a symbol of the flock confided to his special care. The Saviour is represented therefore as the Shepherd of shepherds amongst His fellow-workers in the tending of His mystical flock. St. Paul is sculptured standing on His left and St. Peter on his right, and the Saviour turning benignly towards the latter caresses the lamb in front of him. This group was certainly meant to recall the "Pasce oves meas," and Peter's lamb symbolises the whole Christian flock of which he is the universal shepherd. (Fig. 14).

But another and still more important composition of ancient Christian Art requires careful study, and it is that of the Moses-Peter. (Fig. 15).

The group of Moses striking the rock has not an historical but a symbolical meaning in ancient Art and is explained by those words of St. Paul: "Bibebant autem de spiritali consequente eos petra; petra autem erat Christus,"—"And they drank of the spiritual rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ" (I Corinthians, x, 4).

Therefore it is the water of divine grace springing from Christ through the agency of the Church and her Sacraments that is meant; so much so that in the crypts of the cemetery of Callixtus, dating from the third century, we find the mystical figure of Moses striking the rock as chief among all the scenes representing Baptism, Penance and the Eucharist.

But we may rightly apply to St. Peter this personification of the Church's authority in a very special sense.

Moses in many paintings and sculptures bears the typical features which by tradition are those of Peter, but three monuments clear away every doubt on the subject, viz., the bottom of two glass cups found in the Roman catacombs and a glass plate at Podgoritza (Black Mountains). The two former are treasured in the Sacred Museum of the Vatican Library.

In both glasses the Hebrew Lawgiver is in the act of striking the rock, and near the figure of Moses is the name PETRUS written in gold. On the plate at Podgoritza the inscription explains the scene even more clearly by the words, " Peter struck with the rod and the waters began to flow "—" Petrus virga percussit, fontes coeperunt currere."

This symbolism must have originated in the name itself—Petrus—derived from Petra or rock, upon which Christ founded His Church. This agrees very well with the words of St. Augustine, who mentioning the confession made by Peter of Christ's Divinity, says: " He was therefore called Petrus as personifying the Church, for it was not said to him: thou art Petra (rock), but thou art Petrus, the rock indeed was Christ."[1] In these words I fancy I see an allusion to the group just mentioned, which must have been known to Augustine.

A very appropriate comment on the figure of Moses-Peter has been left to us by Maximus of Turin (V Century) who says in one of his Homilies that in a certain sense Christ shared His own authority with Peter, " By Christ Peter is made petra (rock) "—" per Christum Petrus factus est petra," and adds, " as water flowed from a

[1] Retractationes Cap. 21.

rock to the thirsty people in the desert, likewise from the mouth of Peter flowed a spring of heavenly doctrine for the whole world, weary of the aridity of wickedness" —"Nam sicut in deserto dominico sitienti populo aqua fluxit e petra, ita universo mundo perfidiae ariditate lassato de ore Petri fons salutiferae confessionis emersit."

His contemporary, St. Leo the Great, expresses himself in a similar manner: "Blessed Peter persevering with the acquired strength of a rock . . . was placed so much above the others that while he was called Rock and said to be a foundation . . . by this very name we are able to know what were his connections with Christ" —"Beatus Petrus in accepta fortitudine petrae perseverans . . . sic prae ceteris est ordinatus ut dum petra dicitur dum fundamentum pronunciatur . . . qualis ipsi cum Christo esset Societas per ipsam appellationem eius mysteria nosceremur" (*St. Leonis, Serm. II, App. ed. Ballerin, Tom. I. page* 6).

It is therefore to Peter's valiant confession that we must refer the representation of Moses-Peter, which evidently alludes to his supremacy as the representative of the whole Church according to the thought of St. Augustine, "in order to establish the Church on one rock"—"ut in uno Petro formaret Ecclesiam."[1]

Another and beautiful version of this scene can be admired in the British Museum. Instead of Peter it is his Chair that is seen placed before the mystical rock whence the waters of grace and of heavenly doctrine flow, which composition embodies the idea expressed by St. Cyprian in the words, "To the Chair of Peter and to the foremost Church, whence the unity of priest-

[1] Serm. 137, *de verbis evang. Joannis.*

hood is derived"—"ad Petri Cathedram atque ad ecclesiam principalem unde unitas sacerdotalis exorta est" (*Cyprian, Epist.* 55).

And the identification of Peter with Moses was so familiar in the times that followed peace that one can take it for granted that it had been adopted during the first centuries when the symbolism of Christian art was formed.

Such a conception was also known to the remote hermits of Egypt, as is proved by a homily attributed to Macarius, or written at all events by some anchorite of the fourth century: "To Moses succeeded Peter, to whom it was given to establish the new Church of Christ and the true priesthood" (*Macarius, Homily* XXVI, *Page* 154, *ed. Paris* 1621).

Finally the same conception of Peter as the guide of all Christians was expressed in the monumental inscription which the Emperor Constantine caused to be engraved on the triumphal arch of the Vatican basilica (A.D. c. 315).

Quod duce te mundus surrexit in astra triumphans
Hanc Constantinus Victor tibi condidit aulam.

Inasmuch as under thy guidance the world
arose in triumph to the heavens,
Constantine the Victor built this Temple to thee.

The fathers of the Church give us such clear and authoritative explanations of this group, which was reproduced by artists even in their time, that we can reasonably identify Peter not only with those figures of

Moses which bear the characteristic features of the Apostle and his name, but also with all the others representing the same subject.

Therefore in a very valuable series of paintings and sculptures ranging from the second to the fifth century, Peter is identified with Moses, the legislator and ruler of the Jewish nation ; and thus the Apostle is solemnly declared to be the law-giver and ruler of the whole Christian world.

If from the documents we turn our attention to epitaphs and inscriptions we shall quite naturally find that no sepulchral inscriptions of the first three centuries allude to the supremacy of the Roman See. This is owing to the very character of those monuments, where the greatest simplicity is as a rule met with, for they contain only a few allusions to a future life. It is no wonder therefore if in the celebrated inscriptions of the popes of the third century in the cemetery of Callixtus only the single Greek title of ἐπίσκοπος (bishop) is to be found ; it is in perfect harmony with the simplicity of those times. Besides, this was and still is the official title of the popes.

It is very probable, however, that even during the era of persecution there were some epigraphs alluding to the supremacy of the Roman See. Perhaps these were referred to by Eusebius, who asserts that in his own day (A.D. c. 320) monuments were to be seen in the Roman cemeteries bearing the names of the two Apostles, " Petri Paulique nomine insignita monumenta quae in Urbis Romae coemeteriis etiam nunc visuntur " (Hist. eccl. II, 25.)—" Monuments bearing the names of the two Apostles Peter and Paul, which can even now

be seen in the cemeteries of Rome." And as the Father of Ecclesiastical history quotes these documents as traditional arguments they must have been already old in his day, and must date from the first years of Christianity.

But with the advent of peace in the fourth century the great historical and monumental inscriptions began and it is in these that we may expect to find some allusion to the dignity and authority of the Apostolic See.

I shall quote a few examples. Here is part of the inscription relating to Pope Liberius, buried in the cemetery of Priscilla. (A.D. 352-366).

" Dignus qui merito inlibatus jure perennis
Huic tantae Sedi Christi splendore serenae
Electus fidei plenus summusque sacerdos
Qui nivea mente immaculatus papa sederes
Qui bene apostolicam doctrinam sancte doceres
Innocuam plebem celesti lege magister. . . ect"

From an ancient Manuscript.

" Well wast thou worthy, having been justly elected to act for ever as the supreme faultless minister of the Faith, that thou shouldst sit on this lofty See lighted by the splendour of Christ—thou shouldst sit with pure mind as immaculate Pope, that master of the Faith thou shouldst teach well in holiness the doctrine left by the Apostles to the Christian people. . . . "

The Roman See is declared to be the noblest of all, to be illuminated with the splendour of Christ, and he who sits there to be invested with full and supreme

priestly authority—plenus summusque sacerdos—which passage clearly explains what was the conception of the pontifical dignity in the very first days of the peace epoch. And this creed must have been unanimously accepted by the Church, since it was inscribed on a public monument destined to remain before the eyes of all men.

Here follow the verses that Pope Damasus, the successor of Liberius, wrote in the Baptistry that he built near the tomb of St. Peter in the Vatican :

With the help of Peter, the Guardian of the gates of heaven,
Did this Damasus build, servant of Christ.
One is the Chair of Peter, and one the true Baptism.
No bonds can hold him, whom this water washes.

Sed praestante Petro, cui tradita janua coeli est
Antistes Christi composuit Damasus.
Una Petri Sedes unum verumque lavacrum
Vincula nulla tenent quem liquor iste lavat.

And veneration for the Chair of Peter, which symbolised his authority, was such that in the very ancient calendar of the Roman Church its festival is marked on the 22nd of February with the words :

Natale Petri de Cathedra.

i.e., Festival of Peter's Chair.

We also know that devout pilgrims used to visit a place in the Roman catacombs called the primitive residence of Peter in Rome, viz., the " Sedes ubi prius sedit S. Petrus " and we have said that it must be connected with the cemetery of Priscilla on the Via Salaria.

The Apostolic authority of the popes was manifested by the administration of Baptism and of Confirmation.

A few years after the time of Damasus, it was written on the tomb of Pope Siricius in the cemetery of Priscilla that he had sat near the sacred font in his quality of *magnus sacerdos*, the great Priest.

Fonte sacro magnus meruit sedere sacerdos.

A more interesting and more beautiful title is given to the same Pope Siricius in another contemporary inscription found in St. Pudentiana, viz., the Bishop of Holy Church—" Salvo Syricio episcopo Ecclesiae Sanctae."

The other bishops were named after the place of their bishopric, Antioch, Alexandria, Athens, etc., but the Bishop of Rome was bishop of the Holy Church.

Therefore it is clear that from the fourth century the Roman Pontiff was acknowledged to be the supreme Shepherd of the Church, the Bishop of bishops. And in the inscription of Syricius we find the same title that appears later in the signatures of the popes, who call themselves the Bishops of the whole Church—"Catholicae Ecclesiae episcopus."

We have already seen that the Council of Ephesus, which sat in the first half of the fifth century (431 A.D.), and condemned the heresy of Nestorius, solemnly proclaimed that it was known to all centuries that Peter, through his successors, was the supreme ruler of the Church, " in suis successoribus vivit et iudicium exercet." And as a witness of that solemn declaration we still have a monumental inscription recalling Pope Celestine, under whose auspices that synod was held.

On the door inside the basilica of St. Sabina, which stands upon the Aventine, a beautiful mosaic is to be seen in which the Catholic or Universal Church is represented by two women in the act of prayer, one the Church of the Gentiles, the other the Church of the Circumcision. An inscription in the centre gives the date of Celestine's pontificate :

While Celestinus held high Apostolic Authority and shone first bishop of the whole world.

Culmen apostolicum cum Celestinus haberet
Primus et in toto fulgeret episcopus orbe.

These clear and eloquent words, added to the definition of that great contemporary Council, attest in a solemn way that little over a century after the era of persecution the Roman See was revered as the first in the world.

And here let me transcribe another important text which I have diligently examined. It is a poem of the fourth or fifth century which was copied in the codex of Verdun among the inscriptions of the cemetery of Priscilla where it was found in an ancient Baptistry. After speaking of Baptism, it goes on to say :

Christ increased the double honour of the Apostolic See and bade this be the way to heaven,
Because he, to whom the doors of the starry Kingdom are entrusted,
Holds here in the temple the other Keys to Heaven.

Auxit Apostolicae geminatum Sedis honorem
Christus et ad Coelos hanc dedit esse viam
Nam cui syderei commisit limina regni
Hic habet in templis altera claustra poli.[1]

[1] That the *honor sedis apostolicae* here means its primacy, see *Nuovo Bolletino*, 1910, p. 107 seqq.

The meaning of this beautiful inscription is clear, namely that the successors of St. Peter derive their authority and supremacy through him, and that the Apostolic See was established to be the way to heaven.

We could easily quote other texts and other monuments bearing on the same subject, but we wish only to deal with the first centuries of the Christian era.

Our final conclusion is that ancient Christian documents strikingly confirm both the dogmas of the Catholic Faith and ancient ecclesiastical traditions. The study of Archaeology should therefore be considered as an auxiliary to the study of Theology and of sacred history ; and one may unhesitatingly affirm that the catacombs indeed form a glorious museum, inexhaustible archives furnishing the strongest arguments in favour of the fundamental principles of the Christian Faith.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RECENT DISCOVERY OF A MONUMENT OF THE APOSTLES ON THE VIA APPIA.

Recent archæological finds have added to evidence of Peter's stay in Rome. These finds prove indeed that the body of that Apostle, and the body of St. Paul, were for a short time buried on the Via Appia: there could be no better proof that Peter had died in Rome, as stated by tradition.

Since 1915 excavations under the pavement of the ancient Church of St. Sebastian have brought to light important memorials relating to the temporary deposition of the Apostles in that place. They were deposited there, or concealed there as tradition says, probably during the third century, when their bodies were withdrawn from their primitive graves in the Vatican and on the Via Ostiense, and hidden near the third mile on the Via Appia in a place called "ad Catacumbas." The fact is attested by the Apocrypha, by the Liber Pontificalis, the Itineraries for Pilgrims, and especially by a celebrated inscription which Pope Damasus composed and set up in that very spot.

Its text has been preserved to us by ancient collections, and runs thus:

Hic habitasse prius sanctos cognoscere debes,
Nomina quisque Petri pariter Paulique requiris.

Discipulos oriens misit, quod sponte fatemur,
Sanguinis ob meritum Christumque per astra secuti
Aetherios petiere sinus regnaque piorum :
Roma suos potius meruit defendere cives.
Haec Damasus vestras referat, nova sidera, laudes.

Damasus points in these verses to the place where once relics of the Apostles had been deposited, relics which in his time had already been transferred back to their original graves. Therefore he wrote, "hic habitasse prius"—here formerly dwelt.

The place was called Catacumbae, a name by which later on all the other Roman cemeteries were indicated. In the fourth century a basilica was built on the spot, the Basilica of the Apostles. But later it became known as the Church of St. Sebastian.

It was ever held in great veneration owing to the temporary burial of SS. Peter and Paul, and since the earliest Middle Ages down to our own time, this veneration was centred upon a large monument standing behind the apse of the basilica, and erroneously called the Platonia.

Let me briefly sum up the results of the latest researches regarding these finds :

1.—On the right hand entering the basilica, a group of Pagan Columbari (graves) of the first and second centuries have been discovered. They stood in a line at right angles to the Via Appia. Conspicuous remains of another building, perhaps for purposes of sepulture, have also been discovered.

2.—It has been ascertained that under the basilica, almost in front of the High Altar, there was a ravine,

nearly forty-five feet deep. This fact give us the clue to the etymology of the word catacumbae, a compound of the two Greek words κατά and κύμβος, meaning a deep place.

3.—Under the same pavement, but at a small depth, the lower portion of a covered loggia (triclia) was discovered, which faced the ravine and which is supposed to have been a hall for funeral feasts. On its walls are still clearly visible a number of *graffiti* (tracings) of the third and fourth centuries, with invocations to the Apostles Peter and Paul (*Petre et Paule in mente habete*) recalling the sacred rite of Refrigerium or Libation in honour of the Apostles. This is an indubitable proof that nearby stood a sepulchral memorial of those saints.

4.—Lower down an area was unearthed giving access to three sepulchres, which are beautifully decorated with stuccoes and paintings. Originally they were pagan tombs, but in later times must have become the property of a Christian association. Indeed one of them contains in its inner hall the Greek symbolic name of the Fish (Christ). Outside some very old Christian inscriptions are let into the *tufo* (soft rock).

5.—Near this group of inscriptions a very old staircase has been discovered, leading down to a deep hypogeum (burial vault), excavated in the soft rock. It bears a band of whitewash surrounding the walls of the gallery which was prolonged later on as far as an existing well. On this strip of whitewash were scratched graffiti invoking the Apostles (Petre et Paule in mente habete) and mentioning the Refrigerium, together with other graffiti representing vases.

From this peculiar monument it was reasonably concluded that in the upper triclia or hall sacred banquets were celebrated, after which the pilgrims descended to the lower hypogeum in order to comply with a second and special rite of refrigerium in memory of the *depositio* of the Apostles, which had taken place in that very spot, or at least nearby.

6.—Some scholars guessed that the Sepulchral Memorial of the Apostles would be found somewhere inside the Church. The whole of the ground under the triclia was explored up to the entrance door, but no trace was found of any sepulchre, that could attract public veneration.

7.—After a careful and prolonged examination of the monument called Platonia, it was discovered to be the resting place of St. Quirinus, Bishop and Martyr, whose body was carried over from Pannonia to Rome. This much was ascertained by the inscription painted on the top of the arcosolium, and already discovered some years ago.

One must add that the sepulchre for two bodies (bisomus) standing in the centre of the room, called Platonia, could not have been the resting place of the martyr, as some people thought, because it is known that the saint was buried by himself, and his relics remained hidden until the twelfth century.

This central sepulchre should be considered as an honorary monument or cenotaph, in remembrance of the Apostles. The body of St. Quirinus is thought to have been buried nearby out of devotion.

As I have already pointed out, these finds are of the greatest importance, wholly confirming ancient traditions especially that of the coming of Peter to Rome, so that Damasus could convincingly write in his poem : " Roma suos potius meruit defendere cives"—("Rome had earned the right to keep her own citizens.")

Let us add that other excavations were carried out in the underground crypt of the Martyr Sebastian, a place of devout pilgrimage from the earliest times; the site where his primitive sepulchre formerly stood was clearly traced out on the pavement, and many ancient tombs were found built in its neighbourhood as a devotional homage to the great martyr.

These excavations came to a standstill owing to some structural difficulties in the building : they are now being continued and when completed they will afford us the means of solving several difficult problems regarding this glorious *memoria* on the Via Appia.[1]

[1] We have many publications about this very important discovery. Many articles were given by O. Marucchi in the magazine Nuovo Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiano, from 1915 to 1922.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

1. The Sacrament of Baptism.
2.} Eucharistic Symbols.
3.}
4. The Eucharistic Mystery.
5. The Consecration.
6. The Inscription of Abercius.
7. The Eucharistic Mystery.
8. St. Petronilla interceding for the dead.
9. The Virgin Mary and the Prophet.
10. The Virgin Mary and the Child.
11. The Virgin Mary and the Wise Men.
12. The Virgin Mary and the Child.
13. St. Peter receives the Law from Christ.
14. The Shepherd of Shepherds.
15. Moses—Peter.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2 & 3.

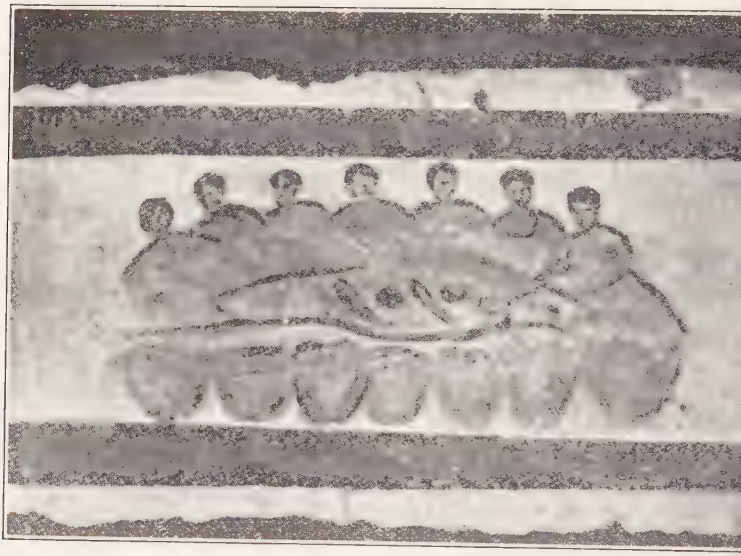

Fig. iv

Fig. v.

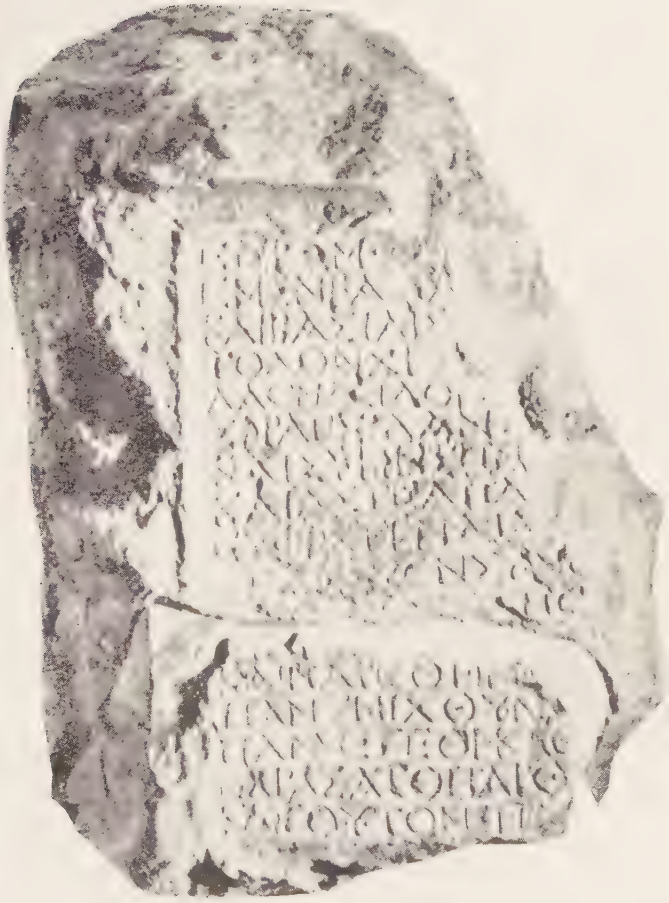

Fig. vi.

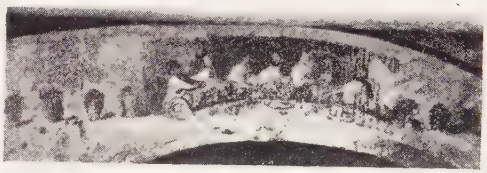

Fig. vii.

Fig. viii.

Fig. xv.

Fig. x.

Fig. xi.

Fig. xii.

Fig. xiii.

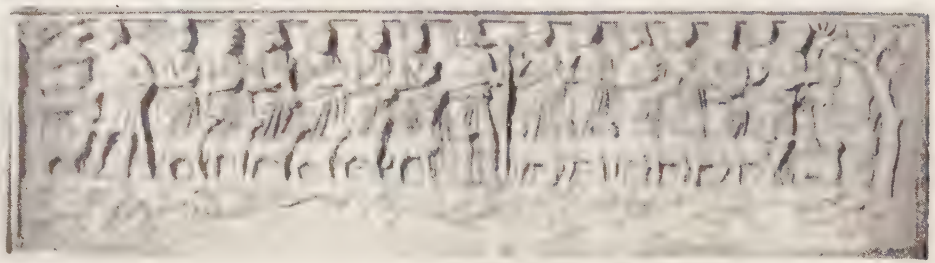

Fig. xiv.

Fig. xv.

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